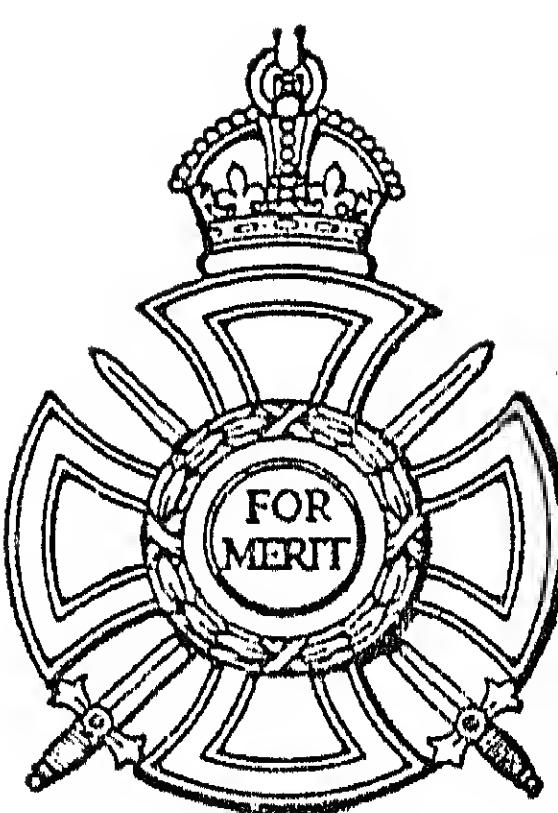




# LORD KITCHENER



*OTHER VOLUMES IN THIS SERIES:*

SIR EDWARD ELGAR

THOMAS HARDY

J. M. BARRIE

LORD KELVIN

LORD ROBERTS

JELLI COE

MARSHAL FOCH





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FIELD-MARSHAL EARL KITCHENER

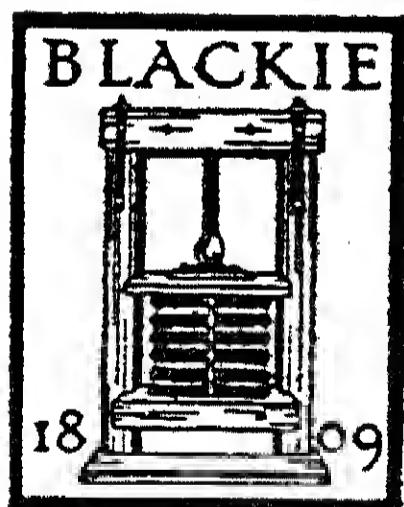
From the pastel on canvas (1899) by Charles M. Horsfall in the  
National Portrait Gallery

# L O R D K I T C H E N E R

BY

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Late Royal Artillery and General Staff  
Formerly Exhibitioner of Christ Church, Oxford



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## PREFACE

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THROUGHOUT the following short study, the author has made full and constant use of Sir George Arthur's three-volume biography of Lord Kitchener. Without constant reference to Sir George Arthur the task would have become well-nigh hopeless. Footnotes to this work have only been made at irregular intervals where special emphasis was to be laid on particular extracts.

On approaching the Great War the mass of literature that deals, directly or indirectly, with so great a figure as Lord Kitchener becomes overwhelming. Within the compass of this little volume it is but possible to touch upon the salient features of his tenure of office during 1914-16. For further information and details there lie before the reader many admirable books. Sir George Arthur's biography, Volume III, is indispensable, if tinged by hero-worship. Lord Esher's *Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, an exceptionally elegant piece of work, errs on the other side: let it be remembered that the author was a loyal personal friend of the late Earl of Ypres. His opinions have been vigorously called into question by the Earl of Birkenhead. Mr. Churchill's vivid and personal writings are based on first-hand knowledge of much that he describes, but are necessarily incomplete. Sir William Robertson's *Soldiers and Statesmen* contains much fair and level-headed criticism. Mr. Lloyd

George's *War Memories* are attractive, though the writer's personal bias may not be regarded as history, whilst being rejected by many, particularly soldiers. Then there are the lesser studies or compilations, by Germains, Ballard, Hodges, and others. Some of the best first-hand impressions of Lord Kitchener at the War Office are to be found in Sir Charles Callwell's *Recollections of a Dug-Out*, and these have been freely drawn upon.

The author has to thank many friends for advice and personal recollections of Lord Kitchener. Among these are General Sir Reginald Wingate and Brigadier General Sir James Edmonds. Finally, to Lt.-Colonel N. P. Brooke sincere thanks are due for kindly reading the proofs.

H. de W.

Nov., 1938.

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*Front:* EGYPT AND THE SUDAN.

*Back:* SOUTH AFRICA.



## CHAPTER I

### KITCHENER'S PLACE IN THE BRITISH ARMY

AT the outbreak of the Great War no British soldier stood higher in public esteem than Field-Marshal Earl Kitchener. His rise to fame had gripped the imagination. Except for the mutterings of the envious no voice could be heard suggesting that his reputation had not been justly earned. Even as late as 1916, just after his disappearance on board H.M.S. *Hampshire*, one of the bitterest critics of the last phase of his career could only say of him: "A great figure gone. The services which he rendered in the early days of the war cannot be forgotten. They transcend those of all the lesser men who were his colleagues, some few of whom envied his popularity. . . . But there he was, towering above the others in character as in inches, by far the most popular man in the country to the end, and a firm rock which stood out amidst the raging tempest."<sup>1</sup>

Kitchener was, in fact, a soldier in a sense such as none of his contemporaries could be regarded. Of hardly another could it be said with greater justice that his rise was unaffected by birth, wealth, social influence or any extraneous advantage; no other commander ever owed less to his staff or to his subordinates. From the very start of his career it had been the same tale. Educated by his parents abroad, he had never fallen under the spell of school or of playing fields: he had never acquired any conventional respect for accepted doctrine

<sup>1</sup> Repington, *The World War*, p. 212-3.

## LORD KITCHENER

of any kind. From the day when he joined the Royal Military Academy he set out to go his own way. Ignored by colleagues and accounted as of little worth, it was some years before his strength of purpose and clarity of vision came to be recognized. But then his character was set and his course was chosen. Like Kipling's Cat which walked by himself, waving his wild tail, and to whom all places were alike, he stood apart and continued his way through life, scarcely heeding his fellows. Of Kitchener, in a way, it might truly be said that he was in the army yet not of it. Indeed, since the eleven years spent at Aldershot until he entered the War Office at the outbreak of the Great War he had learnt but little of the customs and habits of the British army—the end perhaps to his own detriment. He had never passed a promotion examination, yet he earned every step upward by his own exertions.<sup>1</sup> No course of instruction did he ever undergo: not a military educational establishment did he ever attend when once, as a young subaltern, he had passed through the School of Military Engineering. He never studied war in any academic form. He belonged to no recognized school or clique of military thought or sympathy. Yet in spite of it he possessed a faculty for taking correct decisions which, until the Great War, had never seemed to fail. He was, in fact, gifted with an insight into war which no rival that displayed by many masters of that art was endowed with singular self-control, a determination knowing no bounds, a superb memory and an extremely accurate mode of thought, he possessed many of the first attributes required to deal with problems of generalship.

<sup>1</sup> Brevet promotion to major, lieutenant-colonel and colonel; but that, promotion as a reward for distinguished service.



ticular case, was extremely modern. The entire conduct of that war was practical and economical to a degree that might almost be regarded as unfamiliar in the management of the Victorian "small war". Down to its least detail the campaign in the Sudan bore the impress of Kitchener's own qualities, his personality and his passion for economy. In that respect, then, it stands out as a landmark in British warfare of the nineteenth century.

Next he was plunged into the South African campaign. Here, in perfect harmony with his chief, Lord Roberts, he set himself to unravel disorder in truly characteristic fashion. It was a fresh experience for him not to be in sole control, but he played his part in a remarkably loyal manner. With hastily assembled forces Roberts and Kitchener transformed the situation; although in many aspects the new organization was a makeshift and not one that Kitchener could ever regard as worthy of comparison with his far smaller Army of Omdurman. After Lord Roberts's departure there set in the South African War. New problems were to be faced and new systems of command and new tactics came into vogue. A "white" enemy, equipped with arms of precision, yet possessing the skill of native tribesmen, had to be worn down in a war of attrition. Kitchener, in guiding the campaign to a satisfactory conclusion, moreover showed that, by approaching military problems with an unconventional mind but with a creative faculty and a keen appreciation of his enemy, he stood very high among British military leaders of that, or any, period.

Transferred to India, for the third time Kitchener was faced with problems of reform and organization. This time not even a minor campaign arose to br

into the course of his administrative reconstruction, while his tenure of office was remarkable for the personal wrangle that grew up between himself and the Viceroy. In certain directions he did not accomplish all that he set out to do; but, as has been said, he may well have shown wisdom in leaving undone much that might otherwise have been attempted—with dubious results. Back to Egypt again. There Kitchener could once more give free rein to his administrative faculty, although in a civilian capacity.

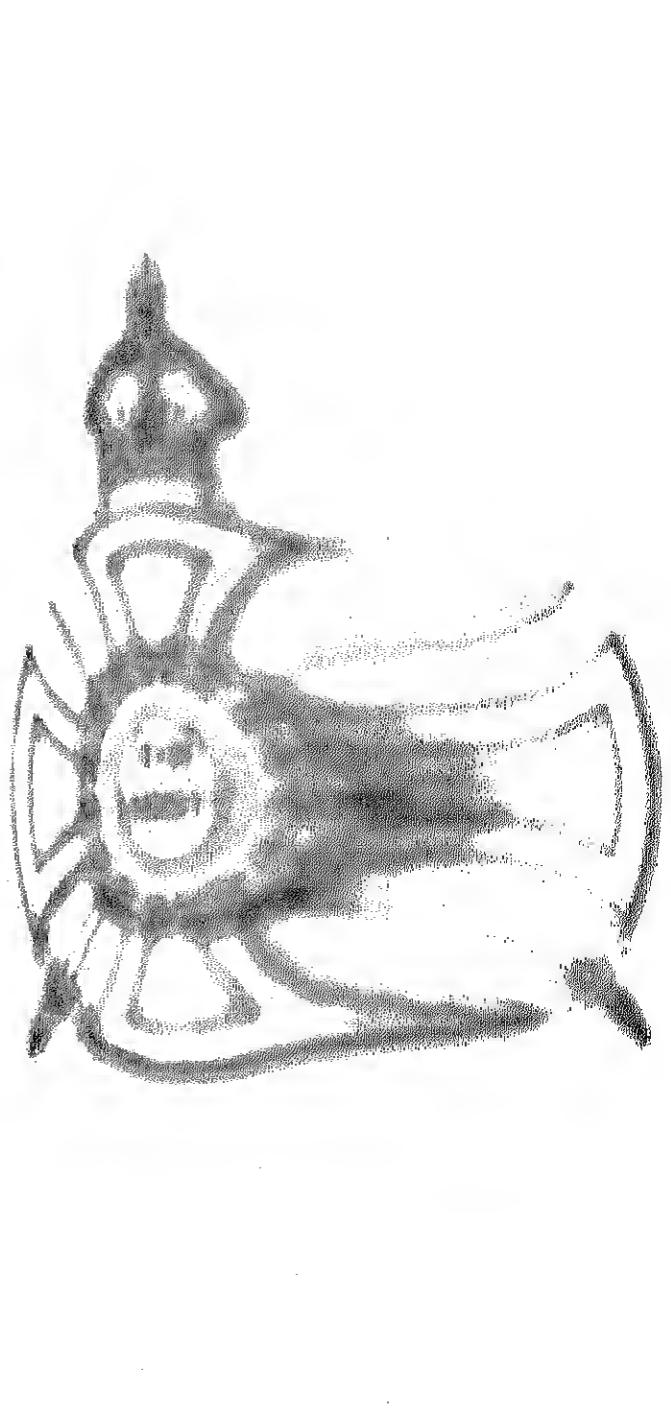
With that record many soldiers might have rested content: so might Kitchener. But the call came in August, 1914, and he assumed the duties of Secretary of State for War, an office that since its inception in 1854 had never once been even offered to a soldier. To appreciate his work and his failures in that high appointment it is as well to consider Kitchener's talents and characteristics in comparison with other leading soldiers with whom he then came into contact, and sometimes even had to control. Among them Kitchener again stands apart, just as when he started his career in the Sudan. He was still the Cat that walked alone. Some feared his unconventional mind and zeal for thoroughness; others would envy the power and the popularity to which he had attained. Nevertheless, place Kitchener by the side of French, Haig, Wilson or Robertson, and the comparison will do him little harm, perhaps the contrary. He had never enjoyed the good fortune of French with his long experience of handling European military problems of the day: he had never aspired to prepare himself for the trial of the opening phases of the Great War. Haig, too, although he had graduated in the South African column warfare, had been trained in a far different school: he had benefited from the



LORD KIRKINNER



LORD KITCHENER



exercise of command and a study of war that had never fallen to Kitchener's lot. The same with Wilson who, even more than Haig, might be held by many to represent the mind trained in General Staff ways of thought, and to be the incarnation of the scientific British soldier of the period. It is perhaps with Robertson that Kitchener possessed the closest affinity. The patient determination of the two were not dissimilar. Both might be regarded essentially as self-made soldiers, while in the results they achieved both displayed a like sincerity and a like simplicity. But Robertson had made himself a paragon of erudition: his faculty for handling staff was great: his training had taught him to lean upon his subordinates. Kitchener, without any of the learning of which Robertson had drunk so deep, was a man of action, self-reliant, an individualist as no other soldier of his day. Not book learning but instinct, even a occasional flash of genius, would guide his actions. In such respects he was a survival of the Victorian age of warfare. With his view unclouded by acquired theories Kitchener, then, approached the Great War with directness that none of his compeers could venture to assume. He relied on courage and intuition, whereas others might suffer some cramping effect of training and surroundings. If he had any counterpart in the Great War it was perhaps General Pershing, whom he resembled most. Yet his was a more generous temperament and outlook than that of the American leader.

As well for Britain that Kitchener should have been the man he was. Coming straight to the chief problem of the War, he knew at the instant exactly what was required. With a boldness, the surer because untrammelled by prejudice or by caution born of experience, he made the great gesture and raised the

armies. Thanks to his popularity, his past record, his directness of method, his freedom from all political or military allegiance, he carried the country with him. If, then, he began to stumble that was not the fault either of his intuition or of his determination. Ignorance of the political jungle into which he had strayed caused him, like an innocent babe in the wood, to make mistakes and enemies. Unfamiliarity with the council chamber, with its atmosphere of bargain and compromise, was likely to mislead the strong man ever accustomed to rely upon expedients of his own making. It began to be hard to give of his best. Then, too, he was growing older, a severe handicap to a man suddenly plunged into long and overlong office hours, while ceaselessly harassed for explanations and reasons never required of him before. Already, before 1916, Kitchener was tiring, losing some of his fire, the fierce determination to do things even in the teeth of opposition. The great exponent of centralization, of the "one man show", was finding the struggle fatiguing. As an old staff officer of his once said apropos of an intrigue set afoot against him but which was thwarted: "The old K. would never have taken that lying down!"

In addition, the strong man, inured to habits of centralization, was often at a loss how to work in common accord with a large staff, numerous experts and a host of assistants. Even so, it redounds immensely to his large-mindedness that he should succeed in adapting himself even partially to such surroundings, and in working in close harmony with so redoubtable a character, so doctrinaire at moments, as Robertson; for with Haig he easily established a harmonious understanding. Robertson, indeed, had set out with the purpose of circumscribing Kitchener's powers as Secretary of State

in a novel conception as to the true position of the Chief of the General Staff. He was to a certain extent turning the tables on Kitchener's own efforts in India to clip the wings of the Military Member for Supply on the Viceroy's Council. Yet even so Robertson came to value Kitchener's prestige and capacity far too highly not to become a true friend, while remaining content sometimes even to profit from the Field-Marshal's great popularity. After all, Robertson might well feel that Kitchener had actually commanded armies in two remarkable campaigns, whereas he himself had existed in sheltered appointments ever since he had, for a brief while, commanded a single troop of cavalry.

To enter further into what Kitchener might or should have done is to tread the paths of pure hypothesis, and this had better not be attempted, for the conditions of 1914-16 are too illogical and complex to admit of much theorizing. In certain respects what Kitchener achieved—still more what he might have achieved, had he lived longer—must remain as enigmatic as that sphinx near which he had spent so much of his life. Enough to say of him: a very great Englishman; a very great soldier; or in Ludendorff's words: "His great organizing powers alone would have sufficed to render Lord Kitchener one of the most remarkable and important of the military personalities of the world-war, perhaps the most distinguished England has ever had."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Germains, *The Truth about Lord Kitchener*, p. 322.

## CHAPTER II

### A SUBALTERN OF ROYAL ENGINEERS

ALTHOUGH Horatio Herbert Kitchener was born on 24th June, 1850, near Listowel in Ireland, his family came of East Anglian stock. The connexion is typified by the name of Horatio, bestowed in honour of Lord Nelson upon his father, whose birth had occurred in 1805. In any case the connexion with Ireland was not prolonged, since Colonel Henry Horatio Kitchener,<sup>1</sup> by reason of his wife's health, left his Irish property as readily as he had first acquired it. So at the age of thirteen Horatio accompanied his parents to Switzerland, where he received his earlier education at or near Montreux. After those early years, spent either in Switzerland or France, and, finally, with a crammer in London, he passed into the Royal Military Academy in February, 1868.

Like many another famous soldier, Kitchener left behind him little trace of his passage through Woolwich. He displayed no aptitude for games, but was justly considered a truly good horseman. Rather slow at learning, he possessed a fine memory, in addition to unusual fluency in the French and German languages. Yet he was more of a mathematician, methodical and accurate in his work. He excelled in mechanics. In matters of dress he was heedless of appearance. Although

<sup>1</sup> He had served in the 13th Dragoons and 9th Foot (Norfolk Regiment).

never unpopular, he did not readily make friends. Tall, lanky, and having seemingly outgrown his strength, it was not surprising that he "dropped a term" at the Academy owing to ill-health.

Then during the winter of 1870-1 the Franco-Prussian War entered upon its final stages. The national armies of France were scattered throughout the provinces. Among these the Army of the Loire under the unsuccessful French leader, Chanzy, after fighting at Mans, had fallen back towards Brittany. At that very moment Horatio was spending his Christmas leave with his parents, who had migrated to Dinan near the Breton coast. Fired by a deep desire to see something of war, and trusting to the advantage of his fluency in French, young Kitchener, with a friend of like inclination, under the guidance of a sympathetic French officer, left Dinan to seek service in Chanzy's army.

Kitchener's experience of the French service proved neither long nor glorious. Soon after arriving at Chanzy's headquarters he went up in a balloon with a French aeronaut and came back with a severe chill, from which pleurisy developed. His father thereupon rescued him from a squalid village where he lay seriously ill. But it was long before the after-effects of the disease wore off. Later from Chatham a brother officer could write: "His experiences in France nearly killed him. He suffered a great deal of pain, and his one fear was that he would never have the strength to be a soldier."

In the meantime, this escapade had come to the notice of the military authorities. So grave a view was taken of his action that Kitchener was summoned to the Horse Guards, where the Commander-in-Chief, H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge, himself thought to administer him a severe wagging. Kitchener

to tremble at the thought of loss of seniority or some similar punishment, until he was relieved to hear the Duke conclude with the unexpected admission: "I am bound to say that in your place I should have done the same thing." Nevertheless this acquaintance with the Army of the Loire so far influenced his mind that at the outbreak of war in 1914 he may be said to have been influenced by recollections of 1871.<sup>1</sup>

As an engineer officer Kitchener's first three years of service slipped by in a normal fashion. The School of Military Engineering at Chatham was his first home. Thence he joined "C" Telegraph Troop, R.E., at Aldershot. A passion for constructional work and analogous problems became a characteristic trait of the young subaltern. All realization of his future greatness, however, still eluded his contemporaries, for he remained too reserved, and not disposed to take part in the usual pastimes of his own kind. Abnormality in such respects was never a passport to popularity or advancement in the army of those days; consequently few friends gathered round him, although his superiors appreciated his painstaking nature and the care lavished on men and horses. One friendship of these early days, contracted with a Captain H. R. Williams, of his own corps, is noteworthy in that it led to a community of religious interests. Kitchener became a fervent adherent of the High Church, careful of its observances, even down to fasting.

In the army it is a current saying that most Royal Engineer officers are Mad, Married, or Methodist. Kitchener fulfilled not one of these conditions; yet he never passed out of the zone into which the army re-

<sup>1</sup> Not until 1914 did he receive the French war medal for the campaign of 1870-1.

gates every man who is "unusual" or acts regardless of what others think. Not that he was remiss in his duty, for he never betrayed the slightest tendency to lack of conscience or to a slip-shod manner of thought or work. He stood aloof and showed that he meant to go his own way. In the Victorian army the man who elected to follow such a path to fame could only look forward to success on three conditions. Firstly, he must find the correct environment for the exercise of his originality; secondly, he should justify himself on active service; thirdly, he ought to enjoy some good fortune. In the end Kitchener was to fulfil all three of these conditions. Until then he had to wait.

Meanwhile, in 1865 there had been founded a Society known as the Palestine Exploration Fund; and, to carry out under its auspices a great survey of Palestine, a few Engineer officers were seconded from their corps by the War Office. In 1872 the head of this survey in Palestine was a Royal Engineer, Claud Conder, one of Kitchener's rare early friends. Two years later when a vacancy occurred in the survey party Conder asked for his former companion to fill the place. To Kitchener's infinite satisfaction, this application proved successful. So after three years' regimental work—the only three years he thus spent with his own corps—he left Aldershot. Four years were to go by before he would spend a Christmas in England: that was to be the first Christmas of the Great War.

Towards the middle of November, 1874, Kitchener set to work in Judæa, this being the area of Palestine then under survey. His first year in the East did not turn out of good augury. After a few weeks he was struck down by fever in the unhealthy Jordan valley; and it took him long to overcome its consequences. Other

troubles also arose. At that time Palestine was still under Turkish sovereignty; accordingly the British survey party could work only by permission of the Sultan and under protection of the local Turkish administration. Provided with an Imperial "firman" to ensure a friendly welcome on the part of the Palestinian population, and protected by an escort of one soldier, the party had thus far travelled peaceably while the work proceeded smoothly. But a serious hitch occurred in July when, on reaching a small town called Safed, in North Galilee, a local sheikh strongly resented the coming of the survey. An ugly brawl developed into a violent affray in which Conder was all but killed, whilst Kitchener in defence of his prostrate colleague was badly hurt on head and thigh. The arrival of armed help alone averted further bloodshed. But both officers needed medical help and rest. An outbreak of cholera in North Palestine provided a further reason for the suspension of the survey until the perpetrators of the assault at Safed should be punished and also the cholera might abate. Christmas, therefore, found Kitchener with his parents at Dinan. Early next year he proceeded to London, where, with Conder, he spent the spring and summer of 1876 in compiling the map of Palestine which was to cover twenty-six sheets. But as the survey was not complete at the close of that year Kitchener set off alone as leader of the party to finish the work in Northern Palestine. Simultaneously with his arrival the tension between Russia and Turkey ended in war. Some anxiety was felt at the wisdom of allowing the survey to continue. Kitchener, however, relying on his good relations with the authorities, felt confident as to his ability to avoid any compromising incident: and the event justified his belief. The survey was completed in

October, 1877, when the party returned to Jerusalem; thence home at the end of the year, although not before Kitchener had managed to visit Constantinople, and even succeeded in catching a glimpse of the military operations then in progress in the Balkans. It is curious to find that he then formed a low estimate of the Bulgarian population and of their fighting capacity.

Once more in London, Conder and Kitchener spent the first half of 1878 in completing their maps, which they finally handed over to the Palestine Exploration Fund in July.<sup>1</sup>

Kitchener was now faced with the necessity of returning to regimental duty—to him scarcely a congenial prospect. For four years he had virtually been his own master, independent, and engaged on work that needed organizing capacity and self-reliance. In addition he had turned in earnest to the study of Arabic, and later also to that of Turkish. Not satisfied with a knowledge of these tongues such as might satisfy the lower, or even higher, standards of an interpreter's examination, he had gone to the tents of the Arabs and Beduins where he had learnt of their habits and thoughts, their songs—short, their whole philosophy of life. The insight thus acquired into the habits and aspirations of the East was to influence his whole life. Greedy of sunshine and warmth, to his reserved nature the desert existence became all but a necessity. It was there that he could think deliberately, as he ever preferred to do, and so to the best advantage.

Eventually he was once more saved from the barracks square. As a result of the peace made at Berlin, the Ottoman dominions were to be whittled down. In

<sup>1</sup> This map, compiled on the 1-inch scale, was employed by British army in the Great War.

negotiations that had conduced to that end, Great Britain, represented by the Earl of Beaconsfield, had played a leading part: for services rendered, the British Government received the Island of Cyprus, whereupon Sir Garnet Wolseley was sent to Nicosia to serve as High Commissioner of the new protectorate. One of the first needs of the British administration was an accurate survey of the island. Very soon an invitation reached Kitchener to carry out in Cyprus the same task that he had just completed in Palestine. He accepted and arrived in the island in the early autumn. At the very start of his work, however, he came into collision with the High Commissioner. Wolseley, on the score of economy, wished for maps that should suffice for revenue purposes, and of the towns and villages only. But the Royal Engineer revolted at the thought of such one-sided work. After futile attempts to have his way, Kitchener appealed to the Foreign Office, which had sent him to carry out the complete triangulation. Lord Salisbury seems to have intervened on his side. Sir Garnet Wolseley gave way—for the time. But before many weeks he suppressed the survey, and with it Kitchener, on quite plausible grounds of economy.

Being once more at a loose end, Kitchener was fortunate in finding a useful friend in Sir Charles Wilson, who had been a member of the Palestine Exploration Fund Committee and knew him of old. Lord Salisbury himself recommended that Wilson, who was then proceeding to Asia Minor as Consul-General to supervise the application of the clauses of the Anglo-Turkish Convention, should take Kitchener with him as a vice-consul. Wilson approved of the suggestion, and so Kitchener went to Kastamuni in Anatolia, where his duty consisted in reporting on the enforcement of the

administrative reforms agreed upon by the Turkish Government. For over six months he remained there and sent his reports direct to the Foreign Office. They bore eloquent testimony to the deplorable condition of the Anatolian population. His statements were well thought of, and Kitchener began to entertain visions of a successful diplomatic career. But in June, General Sir Robert Biddulph succeeded Wolseley as High Commissioner in Cyprus. Forthwith he demanded that the survey of the island should be resumed on the full basis of triangulation as had been originally proposed. For that purpose the Foreign Office turned once more to the man who had already initiated the survey, namely Kitchener. Accordingly in January, 1880, he was back in the island at his former task. The bulk of the work was not difficult, although the mountainous areas rising to over 6000 feet, and still more the south-western districts, consisting of a tangled series of abrupt limestone ridges, presented some harder problems. Still the work progressed, if slowly. Kitchener grew deeply interested in the archaeology of the island and equally in collecting ancient and mediæval *objets d'art*. He also took to training and racing Syrian ponies. At Nicosia, indeed, he rode some winners in the local steeplechases.<sup>1</sup> In this fashion time slipped by until the year 1882 came round, and with it the beginning of great events in Egypt.

One evening in June, Kitchener was entertaining dinner Messrs. Williamson and Rees, two business men established in Cyprus, who held a contract for supplying the British Mediterranean Fleet. Great news arrived with Kitchener's guests: Alexandria was to be bombarded: Rees was leaving for the fleet next morning.

<sup>1</sup> A cup won at these races frequently stood on his dinner-table.

Transfixed by the news, Kitchener telegraphed for ten days' leave of absence on grounds of health since he was just recovering from fever. After an agonized wait the necessary permission arrived at midnight. Next morning he sailed with Rees to Alexandria.

On board the British flagship, H.M.S. *Inflexible*, two days later Kitchener approached Colonel Tulloch, the intelligence officer of the impending expedition. He was on leave, he pleaded, and possessed a fluent knowledge of Arabic and Turkish. Tulloch gladly accepted the offer of his services. Very soon an opportunity presented itself of putting Kitchener's ability to the test. It was desired to ascertain whether an advance from Alexandria or Cairo would be a practicable enterprise. Arrayed in native dress, Tulloch and Kitchener went inland by rail to verify the report that floods precluded such a military movement. That was soon done; but their return journey proved none too easy. Two days later one of Tulloch's agents was found lying with his throat cut at a station up the railway, a symptom of the risks that Tulloch and his companion had run.

Back in the flagship once more, Kitchener witnessed the bombardment of Alexandria. Trouble then arose with the authorities in Cyprus, and so he was denied the satisfaction of taking any further official part in the landing. The Admiral, desirous of securing the assistance of a competent linguist, intervened, but to no purpose. So Kitchener returned to Nicosia after having successfully missed the next boat back to the island. A stormy welcome awaited him; this indeed was his third encounter with outraged higher authority. But he knew how to bide his time, and official abuse ruffled him little. Still he hastened to complete his survey.

His hour now came. In December, 1882, Sir Evelyn Wood was selected to reconstitute the little Egyptian army. As Sirdar, or Commander-in-Chief, he was given a free hand to nominate the British officers who were to raise and train the new Egyptian regiments. Wishing to secure only such candidates as were likely to do successfully with native soldiery, or were known for their linguistic capability, Wood thought of Kitchener still at Cyprus. The latter at first refused the offer, but telegraphic encouragement caused him to reconsider the matter; for one thing, the survey of Cyprus was now virtually complete.

If the shoe pinched at all, the cause lay in Kitchener's own disposition. He was now thirty-two years of age. Eight years of independence had inspired him with considerable distaste for the restraint of barrack life and peace routine. In going to Egypt he saw the barracks closing on himself once again. To him who had tasted of the freedom of the desert and of the joys of ordering his own work, to be accomplished in his own way and in a very thorough fashion, the Egyptian army did not, at first sight, seem to promise the greatest happiness. He would be losing pay, too, by the change, a distaste of reality; not but what he could acquire the temporary rank of major or "bimbashi" in the Egyptian army. In the end he accepted. So in January, 1883, he arrived at Cairo, where Wood appointed him to be second-in-command of the single Egyptian cavalry regiment. It might appear curious for an Engineer subaltern to be thus transformed; but, after all, Kitchener was a first-class horseman, whilst his knowledge of the Arabic language and mentality fitted him uncommonly well for any such post.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SUDAN AND GORDON

OVER six feet high, with legs that seemed too long for his body, narrow for his height, with not a shadow of spare flesh on his bones: a striking head, eyes blue as ice, with a curious slight cast that made an interlocutor feel as though the glance went through him: a flat covering of handsome brown hair parted nearly down the centre, a long heavy moustache that showed up almost fair against a deeply sunburned face: in short, an attractive exterior that arrested attention. Such was Kitchener when he joined the Egyptian army in 1883.<sup>1</sup>

At first he made but little impression. "In 1883 we all hated the sight of him," wrote a certain diarist, "for two reasons: (1) because he was a Sapper, and (2) because he designed a light blue uniform for his cavalry much finer than anything we had! But in '84 we got fond of him."<sup>2</sup> Certainly Kitchener kept to himself, seemingly absorbed by his work, while he was irregular in his observance of meal-times or of social duties; but his health improved greatly.

To his own kind, the normal regimental officers of that day, he remained a stranger: the Cat that walked by himself and waving his wild tail. Of ordinary topics of conversation such as were current among soldiers—racing, cricket, sport, theatre, London gossip, other

<sup>1</sup> He was promoted captain in the R.E. on 4th January, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> Extract quoted by Arthur, I, p. 50.

men's sisters—of all that he knew nothing. As a brother officer put it: "I doubt if at that time (1884) he had ever owned a top hat, or knew his way to Piccadilly . . . of the ordinary country gentleman, his sports & occupations, he knew nothing, and cared less." He was regarded as one totally ignorant of the British soldier: in fact, he was condemned because he had little sympathy with him. It was natural, then, that colleagues should assess his mental equipment as ~~bad~~ ordinary. They only noted an incapacity to adapt himself to what they considered a normal routine life, a fierce desire to succeed that was interpreted as inordinate ambition, and quite a liking for tea parties given by unattractive ladies. His knowledge of colloquial Arabic was derided, even by such as knew something of that tongue. Because he stood on friendly terms with the Press, he was believed to be seeking advertisement and a reputation for preternatural familiarity with Arab and his ways. It was not until 1885 when he worked up the Nile, and again later at Suakin, became known that Kitchener really began to be appreciated more correctly.

The truth is, as Lord Cromer wisely remarks, that there exists a curious un-Christian spirit in army—a belief which incidentally caused Cromer to mistrust the judgment of all soldiers and made him cast upon Kitchener himself with recurring doubts. In all too narrow military life the normal and proper type of officer was infallibly dubbed a "sound chap" "good fellow", and straightway admitted into the fellowship of *esprit de corps*. All others who failed the test were cast out, generally into the outer darkness.

<sup>1</sup> Sales-la-Terrière, *Days that are Gone*, p. 174. At this period a hat was almost as necessary for wear in London as a pair of trousers.



HERBERT KITCHENER  
Major, Egyptian Cavalry



in company with pariahs of every sort. Thus it was with Kitchener. Yet all this mattered little enough to him until the close of his career, when he reaped the full fruits of the feelings that he had evoked in such prominent actors in the drama as Sir John French and Sir Henry Wilson; not to mention a string of political personalities who tried more than once to hound him out of office. After all, he was the Cat that walked all alone, and from "that day to this, Best Beloved, three proper Men out of five will always throw things at a Cat whenever they meet him, and all proper dogs will chase him up a Tree".

Nearly one year of dull, though painstaking and arduous, routine, only interrupted by a severe outbreak of cholera, passed by. Then came the winter of 1883-4, when Kitchener was due for leave. But he did not return home. A survey of the Sinai peninsula from Akaba as far north as Palestine was in prospect, and a well-known geologist, Professor R. Hill, had been placed at its head. Gladly the scientist accepted the suggestion that Kitchener should join the survey and link up the route to his previous map of Palestine. On 10th October, 1883, the party left Suez, and at the end of December, by the shores of the Dead Sea, a halt was called. Here news arrived of the disaster which had overtaken Hicks Pasha in the Sudan, whereupon Kitchener decided to return to Cairo, not by the coastal road but across the desert to Ismailia. In spite of the lack of equipment and insufficient water supply, Kitchener with only four camels and four Arabs arrived safely at Ismailia, having suffered severely in his eyes owing to the blown sand and glare of the desert. Of his work and personality at this period Professor Hill subsequently wrote: "Kitchener has proved a most agreeable companion during our journey-

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ings of nearly two months, while his knowledge of Arab customs and language, and his skill in dealing with the Beduin, have proved of much service to the expedition. He has worked unsparingly and under difficulties. . . ."

At Cairo Kitchener became aware of the true situation in the Sudan. To quell the rising rush of Mahdism through the Upper Nile provinces, Hicks Pasha, retired Indian officer, had led a relatively large body of Egyptians against the Dervishes. At El Obeir in Kordofan he and his worthless troops were annihilated, while quantities of war material fell into the Dervish hands. It was clear that the Egyptians, if unaided, could not hope to retrieve the situation. Even though the full force and military importance of the Mahdist movement were not properly appreciated, it was believed that the Dervishes might yet go so far as to invade Upper Egypt. Such an event must be checked. The British Government, as manager of Egyptian policy and finance, had a serious and deciding voice in the matter. Mr. Gladstone, then in power, was entirely opposed to the employment of force in the Sudan. He strongly advocated a policy of evacuation. For this purpose that enthusiast, Major-General Charles Gordon, was sent to Khartum in January, 1884, in order to bring back all Egyptian troops and inhabitants within reach of the bloodthirsty Dervish hordes. But sooner had he reached Khartum than the flood of Mahdism surged northward, leaving him isolated. Before this happened, however, Gordon had been sent for the despatch to Khartum of one Zobeir Pasha, a remarkable character who was known to possess an astonishing influence over the Sudanese tribes. Zobeir had been a notorious slave-dealer; consequent-

after being deported to Cairo, he had been constrained to remain there as a sort of prisoner at large. In view of his past, and in spite of all entreaty and recommendations, the British Government refused to sanction Zobeir's return to the Sudan.

Things went from bad to worse. Berber, situated some 200 miles downstream from Khartum, was cut off and after a short siege was captured on 20th May: scenes of fearful carnage followed. The menace to Egypt itself was growing. Dongola seemed likely to be attacked. Still the British Government refused to countenance any active operations. In Egypt itself, however, some slight measures had been initiated to check the advance of Mahdism. At the end of March, whilst Berber was still in Egyptian hands, the Sirdar was asked to take steps to keep open the two roads leading to Berber, namely the one leading in from Suakin on the Red Sea coast, and the other from Korosko across the Nubian desert. This was to be achieved by keeping the local tribes to their allegiance to the Khedive, and the agency whereby this result should be secured was to be a camel corps raised among the friendly Ababdeh Arabs. The two British officers entrusted with the task of raising this corps were Kitchener and his friend of the Royal Artillery, Leslie Rundle. During April, May and early June, at Assuan, the farthest point southwards which could be claimed as wholly loyal to the Khedive, the new Frontier Force was formed. A move was then made up the Nile as far as Korosko. Another advance to Abu-Hamed, the northernmost apex of the great bend in the Nile, was contemplated; but the investment of this place by the Dervishes then rendered such a move out of the question. Accordingly a line of posts was established eastwards

across the desert so as to bar the advance of the] vishes.

Kitchener then decided to follow the Nile it towards Dongola, for his mission was largely one would now be regarded as intelligence and secret vice work. In fact the situation at Dongola was of scope for a clever intelligence officer. The M of Dongola, Mustapha Yawer, a Circassian, had remained nominally loyal to the Khedive, but at juncture the Mahdi was making strong overture win him over to his cause by various bribes. Flatt by advances coming from both sides, Mustapha Ya was sitting on the fence, when he learnt through underhand channel that the Mahdi would not much longer for his compliance: yet more, that he sending his trusted Emir Haddat to effect Mustapha's downfall. Haddat's approach culminated in a battle at Debbah on 5th July in which Haddat killed. So it seemed that Mustapha was duly committed to the Egyptian cause. But, cunning as he there could be no foretelling what might not be outcome of this tangle of intrigue and counter-intelligence of bribes and counter-bribes.

It was into this hornets' nest that on 2nd Augt party of twenty Arabs on camels, headed by a figure, so sunburned as to pass for a light-skinned native, arrived at Dongola to save the Mudir falling into the Mahdi's clutches. The leader of Arab party was no other than Kitchener in uniform. Only a European of cool courage and int knowledge of the Arab would have dared to risk an enterprise. At Dongola, Debbah and Korti, Kitchener spent the ensuing weeks, openly in Egyptian uniform, but alone with his escort of twenty, cajoled

bribing, planning moves and counter-moves. Opposite the tall, handsome, commanding Englishman stood the small Circassian, beady-eyed, hook-nosed, foxy, and anxious only to secure himself and his pocket. Step by step Kitchener managed to win Mustapha to his side; although trust this curious Circassian he never did nor could. Then the strangely assorted pair proceeded up the Nile to Debbah, where Kitchener spent some time. He was now a brevet-major, although in London, Lord Wolseley, mindful perhaps of the obstinate subaltern of Cyprus days, had opposed the award of this promotion.

But Wolseley, meanwhile, had arrived in Cairo on 9th September to command the expedition for the relief of Gordon in Khartum: for popular clamour had become so insistent that Mr. Gladstone could no longer brave the opprobrium of having betrayed Gordon. The expedition, organized on a basis of a strict minimum of effort, was to do no more than secure the safety of Gordon and his followers. Wolseley left Cairo on 27th September, and reached Wady Halfa on 3rd October. There he was greeted by the news of a first tragedy. Gordon, coming near to the end of his resources, had sent his friend, Colonel H. D. Stewart of the 11th Hussars, who was with him in Khartum down the Nile in the little steamer *Abbas* with an escort of two other boats to summon help. The steamer successfully ran the gauntlet of the Dervishes in Berber, but was wrecked near the Fourth Cataract on 18th September. Stewart and his companions thus fell into the hands of the Monasir brigand tribe, by whose headman, Suleiman Wad Ganer, they were done to death. Kitchener had long dreaded such an attempt on Gordon's part and had tried by messenger to divert

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stewart from the river route across the desert. At the same time he sent a brief message to Suleiman: "May no harm befall Stewart, for every hair of his head will have a life." Alas! too late. But the doom of malefactors was only postponed, even though it would be a long time in coming.

The Khartum Relief Expedition now took shape. Lord Wolseley assumed command of the entire troops in Egypt; the Sirdar, Sir Evelyn Wood, became Inspector of Communications, since the Egyptian troops were not regarded as sufficiently trained to bear the brunt of the fighting. Sir Redvers Buller became C-in-C of Staff. Colonel Sir Charles Wilson, from Cairo, took over the Intelligence, and under him as D.A.A.C. Q.M.G. was appointed Major Kitchener. But Kitchener was forthwith sent to Colonel Sir Herbert Stewart, who had been ordered to move to Dongola.

The result of H. D. Stewart's murder was an immediate acceleration of the programme. Sir Herbert Stewart desired Mustapha Yawer to advance to Merawi with all his available troops. But the Mudir was in an obstinate and capricious mood. He had been ordered to withdraw from Merawi only a short while back. Both Stewart and Wilson appeared on the scene, but even they could scarcely prevail upon Mustapha to move. It must be confessed that orders and counter-orders, supported by hazy instructions, did not tend to clarify the situation. Neither was Kitchener satisfied. His instructions were now (1) to find means of communicating with Gordon in Khartum: (2) to acquire information as to the routes leading to that city. In the latter respect there existed a choice of two routes: the first of these followed the Nile the whole distance, the second led across the Bayuda Desert from K

and rejoined the Nile at Metemma. Each route presented severe natural obstacles: the Nile between Korti and Metemma made its huge curve to the north-east and was broken by two difficult cataracts; this distance would be nearly 350 miles. The alternative track across the desert, although it cut off the detour made by the river, thus reducing the distance to some 180 miles, lay across a waterless waste. The expedition, in fact, was even more of a struggle against nature than against the fanatical Dervishes. Communication with Gordon proved to be hazardous and a matter of chance. The rare letters that came through were not enhanced in value by Gordon's curious petulant tone. Kitchener had a difficult rôle to play.

Wolseley himself arrived at Korti on 16th December. As it grew evident that Gordon must be nearing his last gasp, it was decided to send a "Desert Column" of a strength of 1500 men, all mounted on camels, from Korti to Metemma whilst the bulk of the troops made their way up the Nile. Preceded by Kitchener with six Arab scouts, the Desert Column left Korti on 30th December. It reached the Gakdul wells on 2nd January, whence Stewart returned to Korti to bring up more supplies. On the 14th he was back at Gakdul and instructed Kitchener to return to headquarters. He himself kept on. Some bitter fighting then occurred at Abu Klea, where the well-known Colonel Burnaby was killed. But Stewart himself never reached the Nile with his troops on the 19th, for he was shot down during some sniping on the march. Sir Charles Wilson assumed command, and continued the attempt to reach Gordon.

Stewart's death moved Wolseley to the core, for Stewart was regarded by him as a promising cavalry leader, in addition to being a personal friend. Buller

was sent to take his place, and Kitchener was appointed to his staff. Leaving Korti on 29th January they reached El Gubat on the Nile on 11th February. By that time the fall of Khartum had become known. The disappointment of the troops was intense, a feeling shortly afterwards increased by their deplorable situation which was growing almost precarious. Buller, an unimaginative optimist, was rudely awakened to the dangers that encompassed him. Kitchener, on the other hand, having spent long a time on the Upper Nile, was not surprised, able to take a far clearer view of the position. He long believed that the expedition had been set go too late, while he considered the plan of campaign hastily made and inadequately supported by transport and stores.

The Desert Column had been assembled in a hasty manner from all cavalry units stationed at home until the two composite Camel Regiments formed a mosaic of magnificent men, half of them far too old and, in the end, insufficiently acclimatized.

Next day, on the 12th, a secret agent carried information that the column was seriously threatened by the Dervishes. It was imperative for the troops in their present condition to be withdrawn. Macdonald's opinion, moreover, was insistent that the available transport would be totally inadequate to cope with any more sick or wounded: consequently a withdrawal could not be hazarded. To a nature so tenacious and lacking in finesse as Buller's this was a somewhat difficult pill. Then followed a series of fatuous orders, contradictory or overlapping in turn, which seemed to show a lack of purpose in the entire management of the expedition. It is true that the British Government intervened, and that the difficulties of communication



*Bassano, Ltd.*

Lt.-COLONEL H. H. KITCHENER

On the Staff of the Egyptian Army



and of transport were extreme. There was, moreover, the problem of keeping in touch with the two columns—the Desert Column and the River Column—simultaneously. The latter force had not advanced very far, but it had fought a successful action at Kirbekan, though at the cost of the loss of General Earle, its commander. Anyhow, the Desert Column was far too slow in starting its march from the Nile. Eleven days later it was still at the wells of Abu Klea, where information reached Kitchener that a force of 8000 Dervishes was in pursuit. So the column started again, and in three days, on 26th February, had reached Gakdul. Here the column broke up and struggled back to Korti in dejected and exhausted detachments. A more dismal ending could with difficulty be imagined. Kitchener returned to his Intelligence work at Debbah.

Another two months went by during which considerable uncertainty prevailed as to the future, not only of the expedition but also of the Sudan as a whole. Kitchener strongly advocated a policy of retaining a strong hold on the Province of Dongola. Military opinion was wholly of that opinion. But no arguments could prevail: on 8th May Mr. Gladstone ordered the evacuation of the entire Sudan, thus initiating what came to be known as "The Policy of Scuttle". To Kitchener, in possession of the latest information concerning an anti-Mahdist reaction in Kordofan, that policy seemed a serious mistake. As he put it, "the Mahdi must either advance or disappear". If Dongola were abandoned, Mahdism would threaten Lower Egypt.

The expedition, in short, had been an egregious failure. Kitchener felt it keenly. There had been waste and mismanagement which he abominated. An attempt

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to make Sir Charles Wilson the scapegoat for Gordon's death was set afoot at home. Wilson's own defense was sufficient refutation of such a reproach. "As regards Gordon, I must leave it to time. . . . Nor can I account for the contradictory orders relating to the purchase of camels which upset the transport; nor again for the fact that—everyone knowing in November that Gordon could only hold out till Christmas Day—no special efforts were made to perfect the Desert Column's transport, nor that the Force which reached the Sennar was too weak, and composed of too many regiments to attempt any important enterprise."<sup>1</sup> Kitchener could endorse each one of these statements and more. But he never forgot the lesson, and it stood him in good stead when it came to organizing his own Sudanese campaign.

On 5th July Dongola was evacuated. Two months earlier Kitchener had resigned his commission in the Egyptian army and returned to England.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, I, p. 131.

## CHAPTER IV

### SIRDAR IN EGYPT

AFTER receiving brevet promotion to lieutenant-colonel in June, 1885, Kitchener studied Ottoman Law in London whilst waiting to join the Royal Engineers at Dublin. In Ireland it appeared that he would be called upon to construct new barracks at Cork. From such a fate, however, he was saved when the Foreign Office requested that he might serve on a Commission that was to be set up by Britain, France and Germany for the purpose of fixing the boundaries of territories claimed by the Sultan of Zanzibar along the coast of East Africa. For over two centuries the Portuguese had been the nominal overlords of a great portion of this coast. But their suzerainty proved so ineffectual that for a long time past the Sultan had made good his rights along the coast to levy dues on trade entering Africa.

For this purpose Sultan Majid and his successor, Sultan Barghash, had been content to assume sovereign rights over the harbours and the coast-line. With the exception of a few insignificant inland posts their claim had never extended far away from the sea.

When, however, the German East Africa Company, under the ægis of the German Government, began to annex East African territory, the problem assumed altogether another aspect. Difficulties arose until it

was decided to refer the matter to the boundary commission on which Kitchener was appointed as British representative. From the first day of his arrival at Zanzibar it grew clear to him that the Commission could find little common ground for agreement. The German Commissioner, Dr. Schmidt, set about discovering obstacles. The Sultan of Zanzibar, quite naturally, did not welcome the Commission. The Portuguese likewise resented the omission of any representative of their own nationality from its deliberations. The French representative was required elsewhere. Only towards the end of January, 1886, did the Commission really set to work.

A visit to the whole coast-line then satisfied both Kitchener and his French colleague that the Sultan's claim to much of the coast-line, and even to some forty or fifty miles inland, might well be regarded as valid. Such an opinion left the British Government in a difficult predicament. Anxious, on the one hand, to do no injustice to the Sultan; desiring, on the other, to conciliate German aspirations; determined, in the last instance, to safeguard British and also Egyptian interests, it was difficult to reconcile such conflicting claims.

In the absence of any definite progress Kitchener drafted a memorandum on the situation of Britain on the East African coast that evoked some attention. At the moment, he pointed out, Britain possessed only one coaling station, at Zanzibar, and this, strictly speaking, was not British territory. France, on the other hand, had organized the magnificent base of Diego Suarez in Madagascar, whilst Germany was engaged on a similar task at Dar-es-Salaam. He therefore recommended the adoption of certain defensive measures in East Africa: firstly, the construction of

railway parallel to the Suez Canal; next, the fortification of Perim and the renewed annexation of the Island of Socotra; lastly, the immediate acquisition of the port of Mombasa. In view of British interests already paramount at Mombasa and its maritime trade, such a proposal did not seem to demand any great effort. But the Admiralty was lukewarm, so Kitchener repeated his arguments. Britain eventually acquired Mombasa, and the event has shown how correct Kitchener's appreciation really was.

Slowly and laboriously the Commission went on with its work. It was finally conceded by the British and French Governments that only the "unanimous" opinion of the three Commissioners should count as the findings of that body. This meant that the "highest common factor" of agreement in the deliberations would alone be reckoned as the final opinion of the Commission. Consequently it was only whenever the German representative elected to yield to his British and French colleagues that the Commission could register a binding conclusion. In the end the number of points on which the Sultan of Zanzibar's claim was conceded was greatly reduced; nowhere was such a claim recognized as extending farther than three miles inland, even though Kitchener and the French Commissioner were insistent that this limit should not be less than ten miles. On such a basis was the Report of the Commission signed and accepted as an official document. Even in that mutilated form the Sultan of Zanzibar's claims were eventually disregarded. Out of this unsatisfactory task Kitchener had the sole satisfaction of receiving the handsome thanks of the Foreign Office.

On his way home Kitchener was stopped by telegram

at Suez, and received the order to proceed to Suakin for the purpose of assuming the appointment of "Governor-General of the Eastern Sudan and Red Sea Littoral". This high-sounding title meant little more than the command of a few hundred Egyptian troops in a squalid little Oriental seaport. For after the British withdrawal from the Sudan, when only two garrisons were retained on the Nile—one at Wady Halfa, the second at Korosk—Suakin came to be no more than a secondary outpost in the Eastern Sudan. Since that time the truculent Osman Digna had remained quiet, so that Kitchener could not foresee much scope for the exercise of a military initiative.

On the whole, the tribes living around Suakin had never joined at all whole-heartedly in the Mahdist movement. Kitchener thus enjoyed some measure of success in establishing peaceful relations with the population in his vicinity. During 1887, however, Osman Digna reappeared and began ravaging the country round Suakin. In spite of meeting with little support from the local tribes, this provocation gathered momentum until Kitchener obtained permission from the new Sirdar, Sir Francis Grenfell, to make an attempt to catch Osman Digna and liberate a number of slaves in his power. It was a curious force of some 450 men that he assembled and led out on 16th January on his little expedition: deserters from Osman's retinue, ex-soldiers, and a few men actually serving in the Xth Sudanese but disguised as free lances. Before dawn next day Kitchener advanced towards Handub, where Osman's camp lay. His men rushed through Handub but were then caught in rear. Desperate fighting ensued when Kitchener, in trying to disengage his Sudanese, was badly wounded by a shot in the right jaw and

check. The "Irregulars" then succeeded in regaining Suakin; but Osman Digna eluded capture, although 300 of his followers were left on the field as against a loss of 60 of Kitchener's men. And the slaves were liberated.

Kitchener himself was sent to Cairo for medical treatment; he was also promoted brevet-colonel and appointed A.D.C. to the Queen, who caused personal inquiries to be made as to his recovery. In March he was able to return to Suakin, though only for a few weeks, since the effects of his wound brought him back to England on sick leave. In September he returned to Cairo in order to assume the appointment of Adjutant-General (A.G.). Nevertheless he was soon back at Suakin, for Osman Digna, having scraped together some artillery, had begun a veritable siege of the town. This was consequently fortified, whilst the Sirdar himself with one British and two Sudanese battalions arrived to drive off the besiegers. Kitchener filled all possible offices with the force: A.G., brigade commander and cavalry leader. Finally two brigades were organized of which Kitchener commanded one. With this force the Sirdar fell upon the Dervish trenches outside the fort of Gemaizeh near Suakin and routed the besiegers with a loss of 500. That put a check to all Osman Digna's activities for a long time to come.

Back in Cairo, Kitchener resumed his work as A.G., with the conscience that he might now aim higher in the matter of advancement; in other words, his goal was now the Sirdarieh, the chief command of the Egyptian army. Towards realizing this ambition, he had now secured the support of the British High Commissioner, Sir Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer. Precisely at this moment Sir Evelyn was writing to the

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reign Office: "As regards the opening of trade I am inclined to think that, judged by the light of subsequent events, Colonel Kitchener's view of the situation a year ago was more correct than my own. It can scarcely be doubted that the supplies which the Dervishes were able to obtain facilitated their operations against Suakin. I have only to add that Colonel Kitchener is a very gallant soldier, who has often risked—<sup>at least</sup> his life in the performance of his military duties. In the conduct of civil affairs his task was one of very exceptional difficulty. . . . Sir F. Grenfell on his return from Suakin told me that no one possessed so much influence with the native tribes as Colonel Kitchener."<sup>1</sup>

After the battle of Gemaizeh the Mahdist army gravitated from the Eastern Sudan back to the valley of the Nile, where, in June, 1889, the fanatical Emir Abd-el-Nejumi, the destroyer of Hicks Pasha, was still approaching Wady Halfa. With starvation before him the lure of the rich lands of Egypt was strong; so the Dervish army began to leave Halfa in rear. Colonel Wodehouse, of the Egyptian army, then quietly barked some 2000 men on various river-craft and landed at Arguin some three miles below Halfa. In this manœuvre he was so successful in surprising Nejumi's advanced guard that the Dervishes suffered some 900 casualties and lost a further 500 prisoners. Still Wodehouse's detachment dared not venture into an engagement with Nejumi's main body, so he fell back whilst the Sirdar was assembling a larger force at Assuan. To this was to be added a British brigade from Cairo. The Egyptian troops concentrated at Toski, a village twenty miles north of Abu Simbel.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, I, p. 159.

where on 29th July the Sirdar arrived, with a mixed detachment of mounted troops and infantry commanded by Kitchener, to command the two brigades already assembled. On 2nd August he decided to delay Nejumi until the arrival of the British brigade on the 4th. But on the 3rd Kitchener's mounted men reported the Dervishes to be moving in a north-easterly direction away from the river. The Sirdar thereupon decided to risk an action rather than allow Nejumi to slip away. Kitchener, with the cavalry, succeeded in checking the Dervishes, whereupon they took up a defensive position. Thinking the moment propitious, the Sirdar made a flank attack which dislodged them from two successive ridges, and a general advance then completed the Dervish rout. Nejumi was killed and 5000 prisoners were taken. The Egyptian losses were under 200. The victory of Toski marked the end of the true Mahdist menace to Egypt. It proved the value of the army which had been laboriously reorganized in Egypt since the coming of the British. The self-confidence of the Egyptian soldier was immeasurably enhanced, while Kitchener himself was duly commended for his command of the mounted troops. So his dreams of the reconquest of the Sudan seemed to come still nearer to realization.

Consequently it came as a disagreeable surprise to him when in the spring of 1890 he was invited by Sir Evelyn Baring to assume the appointment of chief of the Police Force of Egypt. Owing to mistaken reforming zeal this force had lapsed into a state of confusion. The result of British tutelage had been to curb the arbitrary exercise of power by the local authorities; but the progress had been obtained at some cost. Regard for law and the administration of minor justice had

suffered, for by checking the local authorities, the latter had been deprived of such capacity as they had for maintenance of order in their own districts. Kitchener was clearly a suitable reformer and likely to expose the mischief. But he did not see the matter in the light. Mildly he protested, asserting his reluctance to abandon the military career and that his chances of succeeding to the Sirdarieh would be ruined. In short his attitude was that of a disappointed child. But he was suffering from the effects of his wound and his general state of health was indifferent, so much could be forgiven.

As Inspector-General, Kitchener had a free hand. He divided the country into three districts, each under the orders of an Inspector. His real troubles began with the position of the sub-inspectors, who owed allegiance to the local magistrates, as well as to their Inspector. By dint of reciprocal adjustments and encouragement on both sides a *modus vivendi* was established that bore good fruit. Existing institutions were preserved and strengthened where possible. The supervision of the nomad and lawless desert Arabs was intensified, while their sheikhs received more extensive authority. At the end of one year Baring expressed himself as delighted with the changes wrought in the Police Force. Kitchener was thereupon allowed to return to his office as A.G. in the early summer of 1891, grumbling that owing to this civil employment he had been debarred from taking part in the final overthrow of the Dervishes in the Eastern Sudan at Tokar.

For twelve months Kitchener went on with his duties as A.G. where he enjoyed all but autocratic power. But with justification he could claim to have been correct in almost every one of his opinions and decisions.

Bitterly he would resent any explanation being required as to any measure he had sanctioned, even by his seniors in authority. Unnecessary correspondence he detested. In most men such an attitude might not have tended towards success; in the case of Kitchener industry and sureness of judgment were matched by a pertinacity in execution that overcame every obstacle. "He-who-must-be-obeyed" became his nickname. Some wag once drew up an imaginary set of rules that should be set before all newcomers joining the Egyptian army; these were:

1. Never write anything.
2. If you want anything done, catch the A.G.—he is sure "to be here to-morrow".
3. If you want leave, catch the Sirdar.
4. If you get leave, go home at once and take care never to come back.

"Legend, probably untrue, says that a copy of this document fell into the hands of Kitchener, who grimly put his initials at the bottom, remarking that it was very sound."<sup>1</sup>

At length in April, 1892, Sir Francis Grenfell's tenur of office as Sirdar came to an end. The question of his successor gave rise to a momentary flutter. But Lord Cromer threw his weight into the scales in favour of Kitchener, who became Sirdar and thus achieved his great ambition.

"Ah!" said the Cat, "then my time has come!"

Barely forty-two years of age, innured to the climate, familiar with Egyptians and Sudanese, their mode of life and their languages, and, above all, animated with

<sup>1</sup> Ballard, *Kitchener*, p. 59.

a stubborn desire to smash Mahdism by military action. Kitchener was unquestionably the man to fill the appointment of Sirdar, if the reconquest of the Sudan by force of arms were to be the accepted policy of the Egyptian and British Governments. But the instrument was not yet ready. The Egyptian army, indeed, the Kitchener now commanded, was a very different organism from that which it had been ten years earlier. In 1882 the Egyptian conscript had been dragged from his home against his will. Badly housed, badly fed, kept amid miserable surroundings in dirty barracks, his entire military service had been made a hell upon earth, which could not conduce to everyday contentment nor to devotion to duty in war. The record of the Egyptian army on service was black. Tel-el-Kebir, the surrender of Cairo, and Hicks Pasha's disaster at El Obeid, not to mention many lesser incidents—these could only bear witness to a lamentable absence of martial qualities.

With the arrival of the British officer things were changed. The recruitment of the soldier was humanised, whilst his treatment in barracks underwent a dramatic change. Clothing improved; pay became a reality; pay regularly issued. The training of the troops became a serious concern to the officer and the not infrequent brutality of the instructors came to an end. Above all, leave was granted regularly. By such reforms the respect of the soldier returned. Discipline, no longer enforced by methods of savage repression, revived. The enlistment of the army became an easy matter, whilst the quality of the recruit improved. Such were the result of the system initiated by the first Sirdar, Sir Evelyn Wood, and carried on by his successor, Sir Francis Grenfell. At their disposal stood a small

body of picked British officers and N.C.O.'s, no more than sixty in number. The fruit was not long in maturing. At Ginnis in 1885, in lesser engagements, lastly at Toski in 1889, the new Egyptian army was fast showing that it was growing into a fit instrument to meet the Dervishes in the warfare of the Sudan. Indeed of the work achieved by those young British officers and N.C.O.'s Kipling could justly write:

Said England unto Pharaoh, " You've had miracles before,  
When Aaron struck your rivers into blood;  
But if you watch the Sergeant he can show you something  
more,  
He's a charm for making riflemen from mud.

(*Pharaoh and the Sergeant.*)

On becoming Sirdar in 1892, Kitchener thus knew that his army was assuming a shape that might enable it to reach Khartum. But much remained to be done. The campaign that he had in view might be severe; owing to its duration and nature it might impose a prolonged strain on the troops, far greater than what they had ever endured. Neither did he reckon that the numbers of the army, as it then stood, would be adequate to carry out the reconquest of the entire Sudan. But the main obstacle to any increase of inadequate numbers lay in the shackles riveted on the military establishment by the Treaties and the international financial control imposed on Egypt in 1882. The maximum strength of the Egyptian army had been fixed at 18,000, whilst the expenditure sanctioned for the upkeep of those numbers had been set down to a miserably low figure. In order to maintain, clothe, equip and train even that small total there was required a degree of thrift and of cleverness that constantly verged on miserly parsimony.

To Kitchener the exercise of the necessary economy became into a ruling passion that gave rise to no little witticism. It might be said that every article of equipment and clothing could, under his régime, be repaired or patched until it bore no semblance to its original purpose: finally it might be converted into an entirely new article. Undeterred, Kitchener kept on his way until by his cheese-paring methods, as well as by passing men out to the reserve before their time, he could count on forming, on mobilization, three more reserve battalions of infantry over and above the statutory establishment. The latter for the entire army stood at four squadrons of cavalry, three batteries of artillery, and fourteen battalions of infantry. Of the last named, eight were composed of native Egyptians, whilst the other six were entirely recruited from Sudanese blacks. Four of the Egyptian battalions were officered by British and Egyptians, four by Egyptians alone; but no Egyptian could hold higher rank than that of kaimakam (tenant-colonel). The Sudanese battalions were led by seven British officers with Sudanese under-officers, despite of their abnormally thin legs and narrow chests. The Sudanese made fine soldiers; but, being excitable, their shooting might be regarded as indifferent in battle, whilst their craving for hand-to-hand fighting rendered their steadiness a debatable quantity. Nevertheless, they had all shown true aptitude in such frontier fighting as had fallen to their lot. Attached to each battalion was a quota of dusky dames—wives by courtesy, and housekeepers by occupation—who cooked and "did for them" generally. In time of war the ladies were left behind, so that the men, to their disgust, had to fend for themselves. When a battalion "moved" the feminine establishment might be turned over to

newcomers. It was once said that these dames were the only living beings that ever defeated Kitchener. That is possible, for he habitually sought to avoid feminine problems. Thus after the battle of Omdurman Lord Cromer sent a telegram to London stating that "the effect of our having killed &c. 30,000 Dervishes is that the Sirdar has 30,000 women on his hands and would be very much obliged if he could be instructed how to dispose of them, as he has no use for them himself."<sup>1</sup> Certain it is that Kitchener, who used to go through the credentials of every applicant for employment with the Egyptian army, insisted on absolute celibacy on the part of his chosen candidates.

The work was strenuous, yet all these young British officers knew that they were working to a very real end and that their lives might depend on the success of their efforts. One officer declared that he never did less than twenty-five hours' work in the twenty-four and usually spent the next day in undoing it again because "K" disapproved. In short he envied the Pharaohs, who had known many plagues but had never known "K".<sup>2</sup> Still this is a somewhat one-sided view of the Sirdar. Among those whom he disliked, mistrusted, thought inefficient or failed to understand he could never be a popular chief. But to that small number of those upon whom he could depend as sympathetic assistants or subordinates he always would show himself a generous and broad-minded master. At any rate Kitchener was a remarkable judge of men. To the last he generally knew how to find the right man for the right place, and he was admirably served.

But as Lord Cromer stated, particularly in his younger

<sup>1</sup> Lord Esher, *Journals*, I, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> Ballard, *Kitchener*, p. 70.

days, he could be a hard taskmaster whose exterior seldom relaxed; his manner to his subordinates might often appear severe or even lacking in humanity. To him soldiers and regiments were mainly the tools which he must use to convert his schemes into a concrete edifice. "I have got Kitchener to relax his leave rules in favour of the English officers," wrote Cromer in January, 1899—that is only after Omdurman had destroyed the Mahdist menace. "It is an important point, as everything depends on them, and they are so terrified of their chief that they do not dare to state their own grievances." His discipline was yet more unbending when it came to dealing with his native troops. It was not always plain sailing and when, once actually happened, the exacting methods of the Sirdar created unrest in the Egyptian ranks, the danger was exacerbated by the disloyalty of the Khedive towards Kitchener and the British régime.<sup>1</sup> At times Lord Cromer had not an easy hand to play. To cajole the Khedive on the one hand, whilst pacifying the autocratic Sirdar on the other, was not a simple task. At Wady Halfa in January, 1894, the young Khedive Abbas reviewed the whole garrison. Nothing could have been more pointed than the manner in which he made disparaging remarks as to the bearing and manhood of all regiments commanded by British officers. After the review Kitchener remonstrated with the Khedive in most correct language, at the same time tendering his own resignation together with that of the British officers. The Khedive was confounded. Calmness followed, and it needed all Lord Cromer's ability

<sup>1</sup> It is said that when Queen Victoria was once approached on the subject of Kitchener going to India, the royal approval was doubtful—"he was not good with natives".



THE SIRDAR, SIR H. H. KITCHENER, AND HIS A.D.C.  
BIMBASHI J. K. WATSON, 1897

From a sketch by W. T. Maud published in the "Graphic"

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## CHAPTER V

## OMDURMAN

FOR years the reconquest of the Sudan had been Kitchener's dream; the ways and means for the campaign, when it should come, had long been calculated by him to the last man and the last ton of stores. In many respects his task was simple since unknown factors usually attending an outbreak of war apart from Mahdist politics, were singularly few. Remembering full well the fiasco of 1884-5, Kitchener did not under-estimate either his enemy or the natural difficulties of the campaign. Reckoning the Egyptian army at a possible maximum of 18,000 men, it was clear that such a total might well prove insufficient to bear the brunt of the Dervish attack if encountered in full strength in a pitched battle. British help he would have, the more so that he would need some margin of safety in view of the unknown quality of his Egyptian battalions. The rest thus became a matter of mere arithmetic. On the other hand, 30,000 men, otherwise a desirable total, might throw an excessive strain on supply and transport resources of Egypt. Finally there was the financial problem to be faced. The campaign could only be conducted in the most frugal and gradual manner. Any British troops employed must, therefore, only be brought up at the last moment and then despatched home again with all possible speed. The obstacles in the way of Kitchener's plans were many.

Fortunately for him the Sudan was then coming into

Government had ordered a military demonstration made up the Nile valley so as to relieve the pressure on Kassala. Soon the "demonstration" raised to the status of a re-occupation of the Province.

On 13th March, 1896, a Reuter's telegram to *Times* dated from Cairo but despatched to that journal from Downing Street announced that the Government would undertake the recovery of the lost Province. A similar telegram reached Kitchener that morning at 3 a.m., whereupon he hastened to Lord Cromer between them the Egyptian army was mobilized. Important financial measures to support those on were also taken. But confusion then arose because War Office began giving orders for the campaign Major-General Knowles, commanding the British troops in Egypt. Not until three days later was it made clear that Kitchener was to be in command of the expedition. The position then was that Lord Cromer became the final authority for the higher conduct of the campaign whilst Kitchener became the commander of the troops. An excellent combination for carrying on a war. The first stages of the campaign were perfectly straightforward. On 16th March a column set out from Wady Halfa with orders to occupy Akasha, a village lying seventy-five miles south of Halfa, then the main Dervish outpost to the north. This was achieved without difficulty. From Wady Halfa there still existed an obsolete railway line leading to Sarras, some thirty-five miles farther up the river. Beyond Sarras the rails still remained where they had been laid during Wolseley's expedition of 1884. All this old material was retrieved and relaid by an extemporized railway personnel. Rails that had been pilfered for building nat-

villages were recovered, fishplates were dug out of natives' huts. By makeshifts of every sort the work progressed until the line reached Akasha. An Indian brigade was next borrowed and brought to Suakin from India, thus releasing three Egyptian battalions, stationed at that place, for service on the Nile. At length in early June the Egyptian army assembled at Halfa, and with it a battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment then in garrison at Cairo. In front lay Firket, where some 3000 Dervishes had been posted to check an Egyptian advance. Their position was well chosen, for to the north of Firket lay an evil, rocky stretch of ground, the Batn-el-Hagar or stony desert, while to the south the Nile flowed through more fertile and level country.

Kitchener decided not only to seize Firket, but to round up the entire Dervish garrison. This was no altogether easy, for Firket lay eighteen miles ahead of the southern exit of the steep and rocky defile of the river Nile. The attack was planned to take place in two columns. The first of some 7000 men, mainly infantry, made a night march along the mountainous river defile; the second, mainly cavalry and camelry, was sent by a long detour so as to cut in on the flanks and rear of the Dervishes. All went according to plan. The arrival of the two columns at Firket coincided admirably. Utterly surprised in front and flank, the Dervishes fought stoutly enough, but were overwhelmed. A pursuit by mounted troops reinforced by a Sudanese battalion, commanded by Major V. T. S. Townshend, and carried on camels, completed their total rout. Even more gratifying than the actual victory was the tangible proof of the soldierly qualities manifested by Egyptian and Sudanese troops alike. The night march

<sup>1</sup> The defender of Chitral and later of Kut (1916).

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been a severe test of discipline and training; the behaviour in action testified to satisfactory staunchness under fire.

The Dervishes had been completely surprised, for they were not prepared for any such approach of Kitchener's army. Better still, there was now little hope of atoning for their unreadiness in useful time.

But if Kitchener's good luck had thus favoured his progress, otherwise he was not served by fortune. A epidemic of cholera smote the army, and this was but the first of a series of buffets aimed by the evil spirit "the Sudan at the invading white man".<sup>1</sup> First, the northerly breezes, normal at this time of year, failed and thus delayed the arrival of supplies up the Nile. Even worse was the effect of the fierce hot winds that blew from the south in their stead. In August the same thing happened again; the cooler breezes lured the troops to advance; again they failed and the hot winds struck down the men with heat apoplexy. Dust-storms and storms raged, only to be followed by tempests and deluges of rain such as had not been known for half a century. The railway was washed away. Kitchener himself took off his jacket, and with a chance party worked to repair the damage. By issuing his own orders he managed to assemble some hundreds of troops and himself superintended their labours. So by dint of great efforts the four brigades were driven forward to Kulgo by 10th September. There a new gunboat, the *Safir*, just arrived from England in sections and put together on the Nile, was about to start when the low-pressure cylinder exploded. Kitchener, at this stroke of bad fortune, burst into tears. Indeed this was the climax of a series of trials that tested the solidity of Kitchener.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, I, p. 197.

organization to its very foundations. In the words of Kipling:

It was wicked bad campaigning (cheap and nasty from the first),

There was heat and dust and coolie-work and sun,  
There were vipers, flies, and sandstorms, there was cholera  
and thirst,

But Pharaoh done the best he ever done.

(*Pharaoh and the Sergeant.*)

At Dongola the energetic Dervish commander, Wal Bishera, attempted to make ready to meet the invaders. He built and armed forts along the Nile, but with inadequate results for his guns were too few. He tried to make his patrols cut the overhead Egyptian telegraph wires—all to no effect for Kitchener had laid a cable in the Nile bed itself. There is no gainsaying that Kitchener's proverbial luck had set in once more. Kerma was occupied, and the Dervishes crossed to the left bank of the Nile, whereupon the gunboats took up the running. Struck by several shots from the Dervish forts, these river-craft found it difficult to subdue the enemy guns. But Lieutenant D. Beatty, R.N.,<sup>1</sup> then resolved boldly to run the gauntlet of their fire. Thus the gunboats reached Dongola, whereupon the forts were evacuated. By the 23rd Kitchener had crossed the river and, after some unimportant fighting, the enemy was driven through Dongola and beyond into the Bayuda Desert. The campaign of 1896 was at an end.

A long pause followed: for several reasons no further advance could be undertaken. First and foremost there arose the question of Government sanction. Dongola, the goal fixed for the expedition, had been reached.

<sup>1</sup> Later Admiral the Earl Beatty.

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Would, then, the British Government authorize any further movement towards Khartum? Neither the Egyptian authorities nor Lord Cromer alone could well sanction such a measure. Kitchener, too, dared not risk a step forward without the assurance of the eventual support of British troops, for information was now definite that the Khalifa Abdulla—the original Mahdi's successor—could put into the field in the vicinity of Khartum a far more formidable array of fighting men than the Dervishes had ever assembled before.

But the most urgent reason why Cromer and Kitchener must make sure of their ground before making any future plans was finance. Even with the strictest economy it would be impossible to continue any enterprise whatsoever without additional credits. These could hardly be forthcoming, so long as their grants depended on the Commissioners of the Debt, unless some outside backing should be found for further military grants. A long pause, therefore, was made at Dongola whilst the railway was brought as far as Kerma on the left bank; and Kerma was not reached by the railway until May, 1907. In the interval Kitchener went to Cairo and to London to plead his case for a speeded renewal of the campaign. Once more Imperial interests were to carry the day, for it was now certain that the French were making a move towards the Upper Nile. Nevertheless, Kitchener had some opposition to overcome. The War Office, jealous of his management of an expedition that it had fondly hoped to see in its own hands, was not enthusiastic in its support. The Foreign Office showed itself divided in his favor. Fortunately Lord Salisbury himself, who remembered him of old, was on his side. So Kitchener at last returned with the permission to push on towards Khartum a

better still, with the definite promise of British troops to reinforce his army when the crisis of the campaign should come.

The one big strategic problem of the campaign had then to be faced. Should the advance be made along the Nile, using the river as a line of communication, or should a move be made across the desert. Above Dongola the Nile forms a great S-shaped bend with its longer axis lying east and west. The problem for Kitchener was thus whether he should cut off this bend and halve the distance by striking across the desert. In 1884 Wolseley had attempted to send his mounted column across the desert from Korti to Metemma, whilst the heavy infantry force would advance along the Nile. The attempt failed. Kitchener, after weighing the various probabilities, elected to find yet another solution. He would construct a railway direct from Wady Halfa across the eastern desert, and away from the Nile, until the line should strike the river at the apex of its northward bend at Abu-Hamed. Once there the advance, together with the railway, would follow the river past Berber to Khartum. The plan had considerable advantages. First, the Dervishes were obsessed with the idea that the advance must adopt the same road as Wolseley had done in 1884. Further, by making for Berber the possibility existed of an alternative line of supply over the well-known desert road from Suakin. Lastly, the new route would eliminate the passage of some awkward cataracts.

The construction of the Wady Halfa-Abu Hamed railway thus became the pivot of Kitchener's whole plan. And in Lieutenant Girouard, of the Royal Engineers, he found an ideal assistant for its construction. A Canadian by birth and education, Girouard had

spent three years on the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway before being commissioned in the R.E. There he had learnt the art of rapid railroad construction—precisely what Kitchener needed. The sole purpose of this line was to convey the troops and stores necessary for the defeat of the Khalifa: nothing else mattered. Kitchener, himself an engineer and gifted with a head for calculations, entered into the problem of his railway with enthusiasm tempered by sound technical knowledge. He knew to a quarter of a mile how far his rails would extend. As for water—why, he decided that water must be forthcoming at two spots in the desert: and there it was found! One problem remained: the gauge of the new line. The Egyptian gauge was the normal 4 feet  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Lord Cromer had passed the estimates for a gauge of 3 feet 3 inches (1-metre). But Kitchener insisted; his gauge must be 3 feet 6 inches. It can only be supposed that, looking far ahead, as was his wont, he could only think of his line forming a link in an eventual Cape to Cairo railway. Therefore he must adopt the South African gauge, namely 3 feet 6 inches.

Towards the end of July, when just over 100 out of the total 230 miles of the railway were complete, a halt was called, for it was necessary to secure the future terminal at Abu Hamed. So far Kitchener had been fortunate. The Dervishes, hypnotized into the belief that the blow must fall from across the Bayuda Desert, had fixed their attention on the Nile at about Metemma. There Emir Mahmud with 12,000 men took his stand, leaving some negligible detachments at Abu Hamed and Berber. So General Hunter, starting with a single brigade from Merawi on 29th July, by a remarkable forced march, after little resistance, reached Abu Hamed

on 7th August. Better still, hearing that the Dervishes, alarmed at his success, were abandoning Berber, Hunter drove on his Ababdeh Arabs, and so, on 31st August, Kitchener received the great news that Berber had been occupied. By mid-October, largely owing to Dervish remissness, Kitchener's hold on Berber might be regarded as reasonably secure. The desert route to Suakin could also be opened, while work on the railway was resumed in all haste.

During the winter two incidents seemed to threaten Kitchener's contemplation of the future. First, there was the return of Sir Francis Grenfell, sent to Egypt to command all British troops in the country. Second, the declaration of the Italian Government that they must evacuate Kassala, so that either the British Government must assume its charge or else the Dervishes were free to return there. The latter alternative placed Kitchener in a dilemma, since he dared not leave such a menace on the flank of a move on Khartum. But the occupation of Kassala must entail fresh expenditure and this the Director-General of Finance at Cairo refused to sanction: a troublous declaration that led to Kitchener's offer to resign. Cromer was annoyed and treated this threat to resign as ill-timed. Yet his dilemma was great, for, as he wrote, "he (Kitchener) is unquestionably the best man to command the army for the present". Thanks mainly to Grenfell's wise self-effacement and to Cromer's persuasive tact, the situation grew clear once more. Kitchener was to manage the campaign that was now his own in every sense of the word: while the British Government stepped in, assumed all responsibility and occupied Kassala with troops from Suakin.

The final stage was now approaching, and the Khalifa

was busily playing into Kitchener's hand. Not until 19th March was Emir Mahmud ordered to abandon Metemma to bar the road to the invasion. It was then six months too late; he had missed his chance both at Berber and, a little earlier, at Abu Hamad. By this time the Anglo-Egyptian army was concentrated and entrenched near Berber. However, Mahmud could still attempt to strike the invaders from the desert flank. So he moved south-eastward along the river Atbara, the great tributary of the Nile. But Kitchener, informed of the enemy's design, in his turn marched along the northern bank to Umdabieh. Then, as a result of a reconnaissance of the enemy's position, decided to attack the Dervish *dem*<sup>1</sup> at dawn on 1 April.

At 1 a.m. the army moved out under a full moon, four brigades in line. It was a curious battle, more reminiscent of a "tattoo" performance than of anything normally associated with modern war. At 6 a.m. the whole line halted: the artillery came out to the front and began shelling the enemy's defences at a range of 600 yards. Next came the turn of Major-General G. G. acre's British brigade on the left. The Warwickshire, Lincolnshire, the Cameron and Seaforth Highlanders, that order made straight for the defences. The Camerons were to force a gap through which the other battalions should pass. But never deigning to pause the Camerons went on and the brigade just followed. The Sudanese came next, lastly the Egyptians. On the left the Dervish horsemen were scattered by Broadwood's mounted troops. After one hour of hand-to-hand fighting the battle had been won. The Dervish killed numbered 3000; another 4000 remained on the ground, prisoners or wounded.

<sup>1</sup> Camp defended by thorn-bush obstacles.

Mahmud himself was amongst the latter. The Anglo-Egyptian casualties amounted to no more than 510, of which 114 had been borne by the British regiments.

The army then halted for the summer whilst the final railway construction was taken in hand. Rumours of possible difficulties with Abyssinia, further tales of the arrival of a French expedition on the Upper Nile, rendered an early advance yet more desirable. Only one slight difficulty arose. The British Government seemed disposed to send out a lieutenant-general to command the British troops of whom there would be two brigades. As this might involve Kitchener's supersession, his perturbation was great. But it was finally decided that Major-General Gatacre, the senior brigade commander, should act as divisional commander: so all was well.

From Abu Hamed the railway was extended to the R. Atbara. The rest of the road to Khartum would be traversed by river and on foot. A second British brigade, a cavalry regiment and two artillery batteries now arrived. Ten gunboats were assembled on the river. By 27th August the whole force had advanced 120 miles up the Nile. Not a shot had been fired, for the Khalifa was assembling his whole force before Omdurman itself. So Kitchener pressed forward. At length on 1st September the cavalry, on reaching the Kerrer Hills, four miles north of Omdurman, reported the Dervishes arrayed in mass before the town. The Anglo-Egyptian army advanced slowly, ready to meet an attack. The Khalifa in turn moved forward, the halt, as the gunboats and the artillery set to work to bombard the town. Kitchener, fearing a night action which might prove all to the disadvantage of modern firearms, spread a rumour of his own intention to attack forthwith. The Dervishes, effectively deceived, waited

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for day. As light broke they got on the move. Their object was to rush the zariba and then overpower the Anglo-Egyptians by weight of numbers. One division was to attack the zariba directly; a second was to fall upon the Anglo-Egyptian right; a third, commanded by the Khalifa in person, acted as a general reserve. Each division might have numbered some 15,000 men. Yet a fourth but smaller force, numbering not more than 5,000, was making a detour so as to fall upon the Anglo-Egyptian communications.

Kitchener, trusting in the power of his rifles and disdaining the cover of entrenchments, drew up his troops in a horseshoe covering his camp, with the two British brigades on the left. Utterly regardless of death, the first Dervish division rushed forward to close. Masses were mown down until even the reckless bravery of survivors could not bring them closer than 300 yards from their goal. The onslaught had failed.

Wishing to avoid any house-to-house fighting, Kitchener sought to destroy the rest of the Dervish host in the open. Accordingly he moved slowly forward in echelon of brigades with the left leading, parallel to the Nile and heading south-west. Meanwhile, the mounted troops had been engaged in drawing on the second Dervish division farther north. At this moment the 21st Lancers, encountering what seemed to be some 1000 Dervishes in a rocky valley away on the right, charged straight home. Suddenly, when fully extended, they realized their enemy to be at least three times as numerous. But there was no time to halt; so on they went crashing through the Dervishes; 70 Lancers and 120 horses were left on the ground.

Danger now threatened Kitchener's right. The Khalifa's reserve was bearing down on that flank. By:

swift manœuvre the heights of Jebel Surgham were stormed and so the Khalifa's attack could be stemmed. But the end was not yet, for the third Dervish division, after being lured away by the cavalry, suddenly reappeared and gravely menaced the Sudanese on the extreme right. By a cool manœuvre and a fine exhibition of formal drill Macdonald changed front and extended his brigade. Unfortunately the Sudanese had fired off nearly all their ammunition, and only the hasty arrival of the Lincolns and their raking fire brought the Dervishes to a halt. Then they broke and fled. The Khalifa himself, finally rallying his few survivors, vanished into Kordofan. Over 10,000 Dervish dead were left on the field; as many more were wounded or else prisoners. Towards evening, Kitchener, with the Khalifa's black flag behind him, entered Omdurman. Two days later the reoccupation of Khartum was celebrated by a memorial service to General Gordon.

With the Mahdi's flight his whole authority had melted away. Seldom can a military victory have led to such a collapse of an arbitrary and ruthless authority. The triumph of Omdurman was literally complete: the conquest of the Sudan had been achieved at a single stroke. Even so Kitchener's task was not yet done. Reports reached him that a French expedition had just reached Fashoda on the Upper Nile. Taking with him some 2000 troops he embarked on the river steamer *Dal*, and reached Fashoda on 18th September. There he found that the French Major Marchand with 7 European officers and 80 Senegalese soldiers had arrived on 10th July to take possession of the Bahr-el-Ghazal. Major Marchand was entertained with the greatest courtesy by the Sirdar, whose knowledge of Frenchmen and their language proved of value. The affair was

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handled in a most restrained manner, altogether different from the braggadocio that characterized treatment in a section of the London Press. Thus ended matter on the spot. In London and Paris the situation was luckily so handled that the French, in a quiet manner, withdrew from the Sudan.

A month later Lord Kitchener arrived home, where various authorities vied with each other in doing him honour: a peerage, which at first he seems to have hesitated to accept owing to lack of private means had already been bestowed on him.<sup>1</sup> Thus did the formerly unknown Engineer return, and all envied him. ‘That was wonderfully done,’ said the Woman. ‘No question but you are very clever, O Cat! There and behold! The Cat was sitting quite comfortable by the fire. But for all that he continued to walk about himself, and all places remained alike to him.’

After this remarkable campaign no man had a better claim to administer the Sudan than Lord Kitchener. So he returned to Khartum as Governor-General. His first care was to pacify the country, and to round up the few scattered bands of the Khalifa’s army: above all the Khalifa himself remained to be dealt with. The minor tasks were gradually accomplished, until at length the Khalifa himself, after a few fruitless expeditions, was killed on 21st November in a little campaign cleverly conducted by Sir Reginald Wingate.

But duties of civil administration proved more wearisome and absorbing. Kitchener had been invested with powers of a thoroughly autocratic kind. His rule

<sup>1</sup> Kitchener at first wished to sink his surname as not being sufficiently euphonious. He entertained the idea of calling himself “Lord Kitchener of Aspall”, but abandoned it. He insisted on the spelling of Khartum, for he said that Kitchener of Khartum would look hideous on paper.

severe, was certainly beneficent. A faculty for the quick perception of things, coupled with the gift for a detailed examination of any problem, stood him in good stead, Still, Lord Cromer could observe that Kitchener's methods were "a little more masterful and peremptory" than was normal in civil administration. Not that the working of his patriarchal régime was without its humours. "My Sirdar's very drastic method of dealing with civil affairs is a never-ending source of amusement to me," wrote Cromer in February, 1899, when Kitchener, in answer to a warning as to allowing Greeks to speculate in land purchase, replied asking whether he should expel from the Sudan everyone who bought or sold anything without his consent.<sup>1</sup> His official sense of humour was never profound.

<sup>1</sup> Zetland, *Cromer*, p. 247.

## CHAPTER VI

### WITH LORD ROBERTS TO PRETORIA

WHEN Lord Kitchener came home after the victory of Omdurman, he had visited Lord Roberts in commanding the troops in Ireland. Conversation turned, as naturally it would, to the topic then foremost in military circles, namely the prospects of war against the Boer Republics in South Africa, whereon the two soldiers found that their views on the conduct of such a campaign were closely similar. But war did not materialize until September, 1899. It opened badly and revealed grave shortcomings, both in the conduct of the operations and in the constitution of the British forces. The tripartite advance against the Boers soon came to a standstill. Sir Redvers Buller, commanding in South Africa, had reached the River Tugela in his effort to relieve Sir George White, then besieged at Ladysmith. Sir William Gatacre, the late British commander in the Sudan, was slowly moving up the central line of railway on Bloemfontein. Lord Methuen had been struggling up the western railway from Cape Town towards Kimberley, then besieged by the Boers, but after some inconclusive fighting, Methuen was beaten back as the result of his dawn attack at Magersfontein. Gatacre came to grief at Stormberg somewhat in the same manner. Finally, Buller himself was defeated on 15th December, in an attempt to force the passage of the Tugela with a view to liberating Ladysmith. Buller's own failure, in particular, revealed the total lack of

a capable head to control the scattered British efforts in South Africa. The Government acted with promptitude. The chief command in South Africa was offered to Lord Roberts, who accepted it, at the same time expressing the desire that Kitchener might accompany him as his Chief of Staff. That was a simple matter, since Lord Salisbury in nominating Lord Roberts to that post had stipulated that Kitchener, whom he had long known, should accompany Lord Roberts to the Cape.

Lord Roberts left London on 17th December. Kitchener, then at Khartum, received his orders next morning. Making an unusually fast journey to Alexandria, he was conveyed in a swift cruiser to Gibraltar, where Lord Roberts had just arrived on S.S. *Dunottar Castle*. So together they reached Cape Town on 10th January. On the way the military problem was studied at length. Kitchener could be under no misapprehension as to the nature of the task that lay ahead. He was, moreover, quite alive to the shortcomings of a material nature that must be remedied. Already from Madeira he was writing home: "I hope we shall manage it all right out at the Cape, but it is a big business badly begun and the difficulty of unravelling the tangled mess will be very great. No transport seems to have been organized, and all the troops are mixed up. Our artillery has turned out useless as I expected. . . . I wired from Cairo what guns we ought to have, but, of course, the official reply was against doing anything. . . . Roberts, I am glad to say, is wiring again."<sup>1</sup>

Long before reaching South Africa, Lord Roberts had decided to concentrate his forces on the River Modder in rear of Magersfontein, where Methuen still lay. Thence he intended to strike eastward across country

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, I, p. 267.

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to Bloemfontein until he could pick up the railway communication with Cape Town via the central line. In order to achieve this end a large increase in the transport of the army was required. Consequently on arrival Kitchener was set to work to reorganize what he found, and to supplement what was lacking. He soon discovered that in South Africa a quick road to success was not so easy to find as in Egypt. Moreover, the armies and the scope of the operations were on a larger scale, and far more complex than the straightforward problems presented by the Omdurman campaign. Lastly, Kitchener had arrived at the Cape with a mind somewhat ignorant of the methods of work of the British army and of the War Office. Indeed, in South Africa he may be said to have virtually discovered the British army. Hitherto he had really known only the Egyptian army. The three years spent with a Telegraph Battalion at Aldershot were but a poor substitute for the close and prolonged study of the army that is necessary to any man who aspires to command it or—still more—to organize a campaign with it in unfamiliar lands. His long service in Egypt had led him further and further to adopt an attitude that was far from the understanding good humour that is so marked a trait of the discipline in which the British soldier responds most readily.

All this Kitchener had to learn, and his letters testify to the difficulty he experienced in acquiring familiarity with the ways of a British Expeditionary Force. On the other hand, he enjoyed the incalculable advantage of an utter disregard for tradition and conservatism wherever these were likely to hamper his actions. He was inured by hard experience to rely upon his own capacity. Finally, he was obsessed by a passion for economy and for making the best of incomplete

ources. Lord Roberts, with his long experience of Quartermaster-General's work in India and his memories of the Abyssinian expedition, was more elastic in his ways of doing things and less relentless in the pursuit of his own ends; he was also far more lavish in his ideas. But time was pressing; so Kitchener was given his head. By crashing through regulations and by grim personal intervention he had shortly reorganized the transport system of the army. Methods such as these could only be applied in practice where the driving power is derived from real ability combined with an unquenchable determination to succeed. Kitchener supplied both; soon, therefore, the new organization was ready to function—not without appreciable friction owing to the rawness of the elements, nor without occasional mishaps occasioned by lack of experience.

"Things don't look very bright out here," so he wrote home in January. "I fear the W.O. does not yet realize the importance of the war; petty jealousies and refusals to give what we want are the order of the day; e.g. Roberts applies for a list of officers from Egypt carefully selected by me. Cromer agrees, but W.O. has refused. The same with guns. We will do our best to pull through, but evidently without help from the W.O. Utter disorganization—or rather no original organization suitable for the country—is the order of the day. If we had worked the Sudan campaign like this we should never have reached Dongola—most of us would have been in prison at Omdurman or dead by now! Lord Roberts is splendid." Things began to move under such an impulse. A fortnight later he was writing to his friend, Mr. Ralli: "We are getting along a little bit, but we have not a single saddle for love or money; all our water-bottles are so small as to be useless. It was exactly

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same in the Sudan, when I had to fit out the whole  
the British troops with water-bottles which they had  
pay for. Not a single emergency ration, so the men  
have to fight all day on empty stomachs. I could go on,  
but what is the use? I am afraid I rather disgust the old  
l-tape heads of departments. They are very polite  
and after a bit present me with a volume of their printed  
regulations generally dated about 1870 and intended for  
bordershot manœuvres, and are quite hurt when I do not  
agree to follow their printed rot."<sup>1</sup>

The custom had been that each battalion or unit  
should possess and manage its own transport. Lord  
Roberts and Kitchener considered this system to be  
wasteful since it would entail a mass of transport lying  
idle whenever the units to which it belonged in detail  
were either not fully occupied or else had sunk below  
their establishment. It was, therefore, desired to con-  
centrate the transport, and then to use it according to  
the needs of the army regarded as a whole. Except for  
the first-line mule transport of the units, the entire  
transport resources of the troops were therefore pooled  
and reorganized. The process was, of course, unpopular  
with the units, but served its purpose, for without  
some such reorganization it can be asserted that the  
army could never have achieved the march to Bloem-  
fontein. Undoubtedly risks were run. Owing to the  
slow rate of progress maintained by the cumbersome  
wagon trains, the transport columns had to be kept  
closer to the marching troops than was wise. Occasional  
losses resulted. But transport in South Africa was  
at best a constant difficulty.

Everything was now ready for the advance. So well  
had Lord Roberts's plan been kept secret that the enemy

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, I, p. 270-1.

had not scented the true purpose that lay behind the concentration in front of him. Cronje, the Boer commander at Magersfontein, still imagined, nay rather expected, that the British advance would take the form of another attempt to force his entrenched position. To encourage that belief Lord Methuen had been ordered to give semblance to movements of this nature. But this was only a blind. On 13th February, Major-General French with the Cavalry Division set out on a huge turning movement by the south-east and east that was designed, first to relieve the besieged town of Kimberley, secondly to dislodge Cronje from his entrenchments and, if possible, to achieve his destruction. The movement was successful. Cronje, deceived by the excellent stage-management, as well as by the vast scale of the manœuvre, headed east. He succeeded in slipping between French and Kelly-Kenny's 6th Division. Had he abandoned his wagons he might even then have escaped. But Kitchener, representing Lord Roberts who remained indisposed at Jacobsdal, was marching with the 6th Division, and on the 16th saw through Cronje's manœuvre. Driving the pursuing troops forward relentlessly, he was hard on Cronje's heels, while French's cavalry, with horses exhausted by forced marches, struggled gamely to head off the retreating Boers. By such means Cronje was finally driven to ground at Vendutie Drift on the River Modder near Paardeberg on the 17th. Kitchener then attempted to carry out a concentric attack on the Boer laager. It was a complicated operation since it entailed the junction and combined attack of two infantry divisions, one cavalry division, as well as mounted infantry, all arriving from different directions. To direct their various movements required an effective system of communications which Kitchener did not

possess, for although Lord Roberts had invested him with full powers to command, he had not been able to hand over to him any adequate resources for controlling so complex a manœuvre. At that period the army possessed neither the system of communication nor the staffs equal to coping with such a situation. Kitchener, relying on the personal method of command which had been sufficient to ensure victory at Omdurman, could not bring off the stroke that he had in mind's eye. It was not his intention that was at fault, for he understood, as clearly as no other could do, the urgent necessity of securing an early victory by a march on Bloemfontein with all speed.

The curious disconnected action at Paardeberg need no long description; but is of interest as being one of Kitchener's few battles. French's cavalry arriving on the 17th to the north of the River Modder had pinned down the Boers in their laager on the river itself. The 6th Division was coming up on the south and south-east from the other side of the river. In the meantime the 9th Division also began to appear from the west while Kitchener directed the mounted infantry to cover the exit towards the east. It seemed as though the Boers were caught. But then things began to go astray. Attempts to relieve Cronje were made by some Boer commandoes from the east. Although not meeting with real success, they so far served their purpose that the mounted infantry and one brigade of the 6th Division were led to mistake their objective. Next, an important hill, called Kitchener's Kop, was taken by De Wet owing to the inattention of a half-trained colonial corps. The attack, instead of being simultaneous, was made piecemeal. The main effort was thus launched from the west in a disjointed fashion and came to a halt after costing

1200 casualties. The result was far from what Kitchener had hoped; but still it was great. The inner cordon had been brought close in to the enemy's rear; whilst the slaughter among the Boers' oxen and horses was such that no escape was henceforth possible. Least, the attempts made from outside to rescue Cronje were frustrated.

Kitchener, realizing the importance of time, desired to renew the attack next day. But Lord Roberts arrived only on the 19th, and, wishing to avoid any increase of casualties already incurred, elected to bombard the Boers and wait for the effect of investment. General Smith-Dorrien, then commanding the 19th Brigade, which had borne a heavy share in the attack of the 18th, relates how he was summoned to a conference on the morning of the 20th. He spoke with some warmth as to the desirability of postponing the assault. After hearing his views endorsed by Lord Roberts, he rode away, whereupon he was approached by Kitchener, who said, "that if I would attack the Boers at once, I should be a made man; to which I, with a smile, replied: 'You have heard my views, and I shall only attack now if ordered to do so';<sup>1</sup>" a curious episode which throws some light on the military thought of the day, the truth being that casualties were considered as evils to be avoided at all costs, and that commanding officers brought up in the school of "small wars" had come to regard a long casualty list as a slur on their tactical ability.

In the end Cronje surrendered on 27th February, the anniversary of Majuba Hill.<sup>2</sup> Kitchener was not present at this event, for on 22nd February he had been des-

<sup>1</sup> Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of 48 Years' Service*, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> Where in 1881 Sir George Pomeroy Colley, Lord Roberts's colleague in India, had been defeated and killed by the Boers.

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omed. Without serious fighting, though not without  
the sporadic resistance which required incessant  
vigilance and manœuvre, Johannesburg was occupied  
31st May, and, finally, Pretoria fell on 5th June.  
That event closed a distinct epoch of the whole war.  
No sooner was the Transvaal capital in British hands  
than Kitchener was away, organizing a "drive" after  
the elusive De Wet. On 12th June De Wet, after  
a series of daring exploits, turned the tables on him and  
nearly captured Kitchener himself. Indeed, but for  
a vigorous half-clothed dash through the night, De Wet  
was not far from making no less a prize than the British  
Chief of Staff. Then again in the first weeks of August  
Kitchener conducted another great drive after De Wet.  
"Chris", as he was then known, had been located  
in the north-western angle of the Free State with the Vaal  
and Rhenoster rivers behind him. Never had the British  
columns been so numerous nor so favourably placed.  
Kitchener arrived in person on the south bank of the Vaal river.  
Every ford was occupied; it seemed as though De Wet could not escape. Yet he succeeded in eluding  
the British commander in front of him and again finding  
a way. Then began a veritable game of hide-and-seek  
which in view of the terrific efforts exacted from men and horses could not be regarded as child's play. For  
five days and nights the British columns followed their leader, hot on his scent: even the incomparably  
adroit De Wet began to feel the pace and was all but caught.  
One, two, three British columns headed him off: now  
here, now there. The mounted infantry scarcely rested.  
The cavalry marched off with but half a day's ration.  
Then of a sudden there was a mistake: a pass was left inadvertently open in the Magaliesberg Range. Seizing  
the open door, De Wet slipped off and was lost through

heaven-sent gap, Olifant's Nek. It was a bitter blow to tchener, for with the escape of De Wet it was clear the war must continue for yet a long time. For two even his staff hardly dared approach him, so great was his disappointment.

## CHAPTER VII

### COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF IN SOUTH AFRICA

29th November, 1900, Lord Roberts quitted South Africa to take up the appointment of Commander-in-Chief in London, leaving Kitchener as his successor in Pretoria. It was no easy task that confronted the new Chief. The very fact that Lord Roberts, on his departure, had stated his belief that the war was over had caused British public opinion to endorse a comfortable view. It was all the more difficult, therefore, for Kitchener to make good his immediate demands for reinforcements and remounts, let alone for the mass of material required to carry on the campaign. Yet the demands were justified. Comprehending to the full the facility with which the Boers could interrupt the railways, as well as the difficulties that stood in the way of rounding-up their commandoes, Kitchener was under no delusion as to the probable length and future conduct of the war.

This new phase of the campaign, in fact, required a reorganization of the entire military apparatus in South Africa. Kitchener's first task was, therefore, to remedy the outstanding defects of the machine that he had inherited. Further, entirely new methods were needed in order to meet the new conditions. A new "mounted" army had to be created; and during 1901 this grew to nearly 80,000 of all ranks, composed of some 15,000 cavalry, 12,500 mounted infantry, 17,500 Imperial Yeomanry, and some 30,000 Colonial irregulars. In

In addition there were about 85,000 Regular infantry, who with artillery, engineers, railway troops and others made up a grand total of about 240,000. But the fighting strength, owing to diverse causes, in 1901 was never more than 165,000. Out of this huge number, mostly infantry, some 100,000 troops were taken up entirely in passive defence, that is, in supplying garrisons for blockhouses and lines of communication, guards for depots and prisoners' camps.

The plan of campaign which Kitchener now devised was original and perhaps the best that could be adopted to meet the peculiar nature of the war. The first step was to divide the country into separate areas or compartments by means of lines of blockhouses and fences. The second was the "sweeping" of these areas by mounted columns, that is, the process that soon became familiar as the "drive". The blockhouses were first constructed along railways and at all bridges, and their density per mile was increased as time went on until finally they stood at intervals of one quarter of a mile or, if necessary, even less. At the end of 1901 Sir Ian Hamilton, on returning to South Africa, could write to Lord Roberts: "Although I had read much of blockhouses I never could have imagined such a gigantic system of fortifications, barriers, traps and garrisons as actually exists. This forms the principal characteristic of the present operations, supplying them with a solid backbone and involving permanent loss of territory to the enemy, which former operations did not."<sup>1</sup>

Pretoria, Johannesburg and Bloemfontein were further surrounded by a perimeter of barbed wire and defended posts at a radius of many miles from those towns. All these blockhouses and lines were to prove their worth

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, II, p. 8.

out during 1901 they grew considerably in numbers and size. Few measures taken by military authority in British warfare have given rise to so much agitation. Clamour against Kitchener's administration of these camps grew so loud that a deputation of ladies was sent to South Africa to investigate the camps and their management. That mistakes had been committed and hardships were not unknown had been admitted from the outset. Disease was also unfortunately only too prevalent as the result of war conditions in the Boer Republics. On the other hand, the notions of hygiene and sanitation entertained by a proportion of the Boer population were too painfully primitive. Progress could be realized only by slow degrees. The best evidence as to the utter injustice of many accusations relative to these camps levelled at Kitchener, both at home and on the Continent, is found in General Botha's statement: "We are only too glad to know that our women and children are under British protection."<sup>1</sup>

With his own army Kitchener was never really quite satisfied. As early as December, 1900, after visiting Bloemfontein, he could write to Lord Roberts: "This place seems a very sleepy hollow—quite as if no war existed—officers riding about with ladies, probably of Boer extraction, as if they had nothing to do. I think, until we find the police out of the country, we had better not appoint any more officers to civil work; they have absolutely nothing to do and set a bad example." He was never one who could tolerate any remissness in performance of duty. He waged war on the *embusqués* at the bases, in rest camps and in all "soft billets". His efforts to cope with major scandals such as the life led at certain resorts in Cape Town and elsewhere were

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, II, p. 14.

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tic: but the evils called aloud for such treatment. More difficult to remedy was the lethargy that seemed to creep over many men, let alone whole regiments, in South Africa. This lethargy translated itself into a lack of resolution in tight places, a readiness to surrender instead of "fighting it out". Worse still, every surrendered soldier was a ready source from which the enemy could acquire much needed war material. The truth is that the British soldier bore his enemy no malice; nay rather he thought well of him and, at bottom, was ready to be friends with him. Such being the case, it was easy for the war to degenerate, in the eyes of very many men at least, into a species of glorified football league in which they might win one day and lose another. In the Sudan and elsewhere things had been different, for there surrender or capture might mean slavery if not a cruel death. In contrast to the small wars of the past one great source of strength was lacking, namely, the regimental *esprit de corps* that had formed the veritable soul of the army of the past. In a campaign where improvisation constituted the "principle of war", there was every prospect that any unit might be broken up at a moment's notice; either to furnish guards for blockhouses or companies of mounted men for some column or for other duties. Officers were changing all too rapidly. In short the old familiar regimental system with all its disadvantages was seriously imperilled. Kitchener himself contributed to this result, in that he was constantly displacing or weeding out inefficient or unlucky commanding officers. His talent lay in improvisation, and he gave it free play. But he could not improvise either the regimental spirit of the past, or hatred of the enemy where it did not exist. But, then, could such feelings be encouraged when the troops could see officers returning home to com-

fortable appointments or going on leave, while they themselves toiled on amid the discomforts of war? Neither was the example, and even the existence, of certain colonial corps conducive to arousing bitter feelings towards the Boers or a higher standard of regimental feeling. The more recent Imperial Yeomanry, too, had many weak spots. A few units were even of doubtful value. Kitchener, moreover, was at times hard on men who proved unlucky. He never quite cared for what was known in confidential reports as the "good average regimental officer". "One of the great faults in British officers is that they do not look upon their work sufficiently seriously at all times. They are in many cases spasmodic, and do not realize the serious nature of their responsibilities, and if they do so at one time, they easily forget them. Though this is due to some extent to training, it seems to be a national defect, based a good deal on over-confidence."<sup>1</sup>

Yet Kitchener, for all his disappointment at the many failures that might be ascribed to the human frailties of his troops, remained far more understanding and human than was commonly believed. He would be the first to give a really tired man a rest—and another chance.

At all times he was on the alert to find fresh talent: his regard for capable and original subordinates never ceased; but at all times he hated shirkers, the plausible shirker above all else. On the other hand, he was not one to allow culpable negligence to go unpunished. "I quite agree with you," he wrote on 6th April to the Secretary of State, "as regards the strict punishment of those officers and men who, by their carelessness, or through other causes, do so much harm; and I consider

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, II, p. 68.

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this is most necessary for the good of the army as . . . In my opinion strict punishment is necessary to impress on officers their very serious duties, at the same time it does no good to act without the inquiry, and strictly on legal lines. A hasty punishment creates a martyr, and unless Military Law is fully followed, a sense of injustice having been done is the result. Military Law requires, in my opinion, considerable alteration to be effective, and to meet cases which have occurred during the war." And he meant it after the disaster to Methuen's column on 7th March, 1880, when a panic occurred among the Yeomanry, he wrote: "I am having one officer tried for the loss of the convoy, and six officers tried for Methuen's disaster. These trials probably will result in other trials to get at the truth."<sup>1</sup>

In a more military sense also Kitchener made great efforts to improve his army. No doubt existed that when judged by individual standards, the majority of British troops were not the equal of the Boers in horsemanship, marksmanship or in the tactics of the field. Improvised mounted infantry or yeomanry could hope to rival the Boers, now purged of all their weaker brethren, working in their native country and animated by high patriotic zeal. Horsemastership, in particular, left something to be desired. The wastage of horseflesh had been unnecessarily high. Besides immobilizing large numbers of men and hampering operations, this preventable loss touched Kitchener's ruling passion, economy. He meant to combat it at all costs. In 1900 such a loss of horseflesh had perhaps been the necessary price to pay for the arduous marches that formed an integral part of British strategy; but now this must

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, II, pp. 66-9.

cease. During the drives of the mounted columns, there must be intervals during which horses could be rested and properly cared for. Above all, horsemastership must improve.

But whilst reorganization was needed, the war left little time except for makeshifts. Already at Christmas, 1900, a deal of unpleasant activity on the part of De Wet in the southern Free State, and also of Viljoen in Cape Colony, upset the best-laid plans. More active counter-measures were not easily set going. At length in February, 1901, General French in the eastern Transvaal inaugurated the first of the new "drives". The scheme was to push forward the centre of his force as though it were the point of a wedge; then to force the sides outwards until the whole had taken the form of a line; finally to press on in that formation, thrusting all opposition that might be encountered against the Zululand border. In this instance he enjoyed little luck. But such was the form of warfare that was to prevail during the next fifteen months. But Kitchener had then little time to elaborate such measures before an opening presented itself for putting an end to a struggle which he faced with misgivings. Besides, he entertained a genuine respect for the remarkable qualities displayed by the Boers. On 13th February General Louis Botha, the Boer commander, through the intermediary of his wife, received a message from Kitchener suggesting a meeting to discuss a possible peace. The suggestion was acted upon and a conference took place at Middelburg on 28th February, 1901. Botha began by claiming Boer independence. This Kitchener refused without further argument, stating that both the course of events in the past and future developments in South Africa ruled out such a possibility. In the end Botha reluctantly agreed

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ceeded to make known the minor Boer conditions; these concerned church property, publicans' trusts, the equality of the English and Afrikaans' languages, war on taxes on farms, state assistance in reconstruction of farms, return of prisoners.

a made a most favourable impression on Kitchener, who would report to the Secretary of State: "L. Botha is a capable man, and I have no doubt carries considerable weight with the burghers; he will be, I should say, a valuable assistance to the future good of the country in an official capacity." He wished to conciliate the Boer stipulations, and went on to say: "It seems to me that the war should go on for the points raised by General Botha, which appear to me all capable of adjustment." The cost of the Boer demands could not exceed two millions—less than the cost of a month of war.

The true difficulty was found to reside in the question of an amnesty to the rebels who had taken up arms against British rule in Cape Colony. That com-

manded the British Government, acting on the recommendation of Sir Arthur Milner, would not concede. In addition, lesser modifications were put forward, notably one relative to the status of the native population.

Kitchener felt strongly that the reply regarding the question of amnesty and the proposed clauses concerning the treatment of natives would not be acceptable to the Boers. His doubts were only too well founded, for at the end of March Botha dropped all further negotiations.

Kitchener was sorely disappointed, for he had entertained high hopes of bringing the unfortunate campaign to an end. But there it was. The Secretary of State wrote to him: "We are all very much opposed to a complete amnesty to the Cape and Natal rebels."

feeling is that it will be a surviving reproach on us.  
loyalists at least have surely a right to see the very  
moderate Cape punishments inflicted on rebels. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

After the failure of the negotiations, Kitchener's plan  
the reorganization of his forces, for blockhouse con-  
nection, and for marshalling his columns were rapidly  
completed so that a regular programme of "drives"  
could be applied. These drives varied in importance and  
size. A large drive might involve the lining-up of so  
many as five or six columns. These would move forward  
and sweep an area between blockhouse lines with as  
many as five thousand mounted men abreast. Yet how  
often they failed to capture more than a few scattered  
rovers—perhaps a few dozen at most, even if, as frequently  
would happen, the bag might not amount to a perfect  
blank. It was the exception for as many as two hundred  
to be caught: the record was seven hundred, and this  
occurred only once throughout the latter half of the war.<sup>2</sup>

The whole control of the columns and drives lay in  
Kitchener's own hands. From Pretoria he directed the  
movements of sometimes as many as thirty or forty  
columns. Grovelling on the floor, with his staff, on an  
immense map whereon the whole of the day's move-  
ments were shown, he would check all messages and  
reports that came in. His remarkable grasp of detail  
enabled him to follow the most complicated moves.  
He dictated messages, orders, recalled his columns and  
set fresh combinations going—all himself. But the system  
had its drawbacks. He honestly believed that column  
commanders enjoyed considerable latitude in inter-  
preting orders. But the supervision that he exercised

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, II, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> This was at Harrismith when a commando of that strength sur-  
rendered. See Ballard, *Kitchener*, p. 151.

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doubtedly impeded free decisions. How could it have been otherwise? Moreover, when opposed to the crafty and elusive Boer commandoes, such a system might at times be conducive of failure.

Yet this was but one part of his daily work, for as the war dragged on so the tale of his multifarious care grew longer and longer. "He not only conducted military operations of a most complex character, on the largest scale, over a huge tract of country, but he had in addition to deal with innumerable subsidiary questions of vast magnitude, the care and feeding of tens of thousands of women and children in the concentration camps, the creation of a constabulary, the administration of military and martial law over the immense territories in military occupation, the intricate problems of native labour, the management of the railways, the return of the loyalist population, driven out by the Boers at the commencement of the war, and the resumption of the gold-mining industry. . . . He assumed the whole weight of responsibility and wielded absolute supremacy."<sup>1</sup>

The pressure of the drives began taking off the edge of the Boer resistance, slowly if surely. Every now and then the British public was startled by news of the surprise of some column, or of a set-back, the importance of which would normally be grossly exaggerated. Given the conditions and the relative qualities of the two sides, such incidents might even be expected. Too much could easily be made of it all; and it was childish to blame Kitchener as was occasionally done. Fortunately for him he had two redoubtable advocates in London who never ceased defending his case: Lord Roberts,

<sup>1</sup> "The Times" History of the South African War, see Chapters III and X.

the Commander-in-Chief, and Mr. Brodrick, the Secretary of State. Both of them fully endorsed Kitchener's plea made to Lord Roberts: "I wish those who say that the war should be over would come out and show us how to do it."<sup>1</sup>

Nearly all such reverses as occurred from the time of the Middelburg Conference until the final negotiations ending at Vereeniging—though not a few—were of importance rather because they were seized upon by the Boer irreconcilables to bolster up their case for a prolongation of resistance. Thus in May and June, 1901, the reverses sustained at Vlakfontein and Wilmansrust contributed greatly to stiffening the Boer determination.

So it went on. Fortune ever varied.

Once more in March, 1902, Kitchener could write to Lord Roberts: "The dark days are on us again." Thereupon the activity of the columns was intensified, and the results were not too unsatisfactory, for the pressure was telling yet more heavily on the Boers. Even though the leaders were still at large and capable of inflicting occasional damage, the rank and file were slowly dwindling in numbers. More important still, they were beginning to lose more horses than they could afford.

At long last, on 22nd March, Schalk Burger, acting President of the Transvaal, requested the British to afford him a safe conduct to proceed to Kroonstad in order to meet other Boer leaders with a view to discussing possible terms of peace. Hue and cry was made for the various authorities of the two Republics, who at length met at Pretoria on 12th April. Their subsequent deliberations were greatly complicated, and Kitchener's understanding and tact contributed greatly to the

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, II, p. 85.

## LORD KITCHENER

negotiations not being broken off by a refusal to conclude peace on any basis that meant Boer independence. Kitchener was adamant on that head although he promised that self-government should follow shortly. Similarly he declined to grant an armistice during the deliberations of the Conference. In that respect he was fortunate, for at the same instant there occurred General Hamilton's success at Roodeval, where he routed an important commando. Then the Conference adjourned for three weeks during which the Boer leaders were bound to ascertain the views of their people on the vital question of independence: it was, in fact, a special referendum that was being taken by itinerant authorities. Kitchener meanwhile knew that the Boers, as much as the British, were yearning for a cessation of hostilities. He felt that the Transvaal Boers, led by moderate, long-headed men such as Botha, Smuts and Schalk Burger, would vote for peace. But he feared that the old fanatic, President Steyn of the Free State, might inflame his compatriots to pursue a resistance doomed to failure. And Steyn's fury was becoming contagious. Kitchener for his part longed to end a war which was dragging on simply to satisfy a point of honour as to whether a few hundred Cape rebels should be put in prison or not. For the difference of opinion between Sir Alfred Milner and himself resolved itself into the question of fighting it out to the end or peace by compromise and conciliation. Kitchener, with the thought of the future and the fusion of British and Boers ever in his mind, stood for the latter principle.

Bitter argument then set in among the Boers themselves, between the extremists for independence, Free Staters nearly to a man, and the more moderate Transvaalers, when the Conference was resumed at Vereeniging.

LORD KITCHEN AT THE PEACE CONFERENCE THAT ENDED THE  
BOER AFRICAN WAR, 1902





ing on 15th May. The Transvaalers were now in a pitiable plight, and knew full well that the end could not be staved off much longer. Argument was pitted against argument, and Sir Alfred Milner, together with his lawyers, also struggled with the Boers. Little need to follow the course of the Conference. Kitchener maintained the contention that there could be little difference between the freedom enjoyed by a Boer Republic and that granted to a self-governing British Dominion. At length after various minor concessions, such as substituting the term "free gift" for that of "compensation" applied to the £3,000,000 which was to be paid to the new South African Government, a document was drawn up for signature. In the end the terms were very similar to those that might have been fixed fourteen months earlier. On 31st May at 2.30 p.m. the Boer representatives voted on the acceptance of the terms: by 54 to 6 the Conference decided to sign the document; and this was done. Amid scenes of wild enthusiasm the fact was proclaimed in Johannesburg, when Kitchener himself also became the object of an uproarious reception. So, too, thought the British public, who gave Kitchener a magnificent welcome on his return to London.

"And the Woman said to the Cat: 'A hundred thanks. Even the First Friend is not quick enough to catch little mice as you have done. You must be very wise!'"

Thus ended the South African War. The conclusion had been Kitchener's own handiwork. No spectacular battle crowned the long tedious months of blockhouse-and-column warfare; no display of generalship brought about its last act. It was attributable to a clear perception of the issues at stake and to far-sighted broad-mindedness: to little else.

Although Kitchener had never been a student of any "theory of war", he had realized the implications of the campaign to the full; he never regarded it as a war of conquest or of subjugation, but rather as the inevitable road to effecting a fusion of the British and Dutch populations in South Africa. That was the key to his conduct of the abortive peace negotiations in the spring of 1901, just as the same conviction lay behind his management of the final surrender of Boer and the Boer commandoes in 1902. He never intended to be a "conqueror" in the full sense of that term. The Boers themselves were the first to see in him a magnanimous victor. A war of attrition, indeed, was how Kitchener loathed it all!

From a purely military standpoint some real strictures could be passed on him for the degree to which his conduct of the operations remained centred in his own hands; for this concealed a genuine source of danger. Already in the Sudan in 1898, a staff officer, the future Lord Rawlinson, had stated: "The one serious criticism I have is that this is too much of a one-man show. If anything were to happen to the Sirdar there would be chaos, as no one but he knows the state of preparedness in which the various departments are. He keeps all information regarding the details of railways, transport steamers, supply and intelligence, in his own hand and shows wonderful skill in working the various strings. Everything works smoothly and well, as long as he is at the head of affairs."<sup>1</sup> So it was once more in South Africa, 1901-2.

After the enthusiasm of the home-coming had died down there came the Elgin South African War Commission. In October Kitchener gave his evidence before

<sup>1</sup> Maurice, *General Lord Rawlinson*, pp. 31-2.

that body. In a letter to King Edward, Lord Esher described his statement as "most valuable and he showed himself to be a man of great penetration, decision and organizing power". But Lord Esher also comments on the astonishing fact that Kitchener's views concerning possible army reform had never yet been requested by the War Office!

## CHAPTER VIII

### KITCHENER AND CURZON

AFTER a long period of grave ill-health, General Sir William Lockhart, Commander-in-Chief in India,<sup>1</sup> had died in March, 1900, whilst in full tenure of his appointment. According to old-established custom his successor must be an officer of the British Service. Lord Curzon, foreseeing Sir William's end, had for some time been thinking of Kitchener as the best possible candidate. His nomination, however, was delayed by the South African War, and General Sir Power Palmer, senior officer of the Indian army, was temporarily installed in the appointment. Kitchener, too, had for some time past begun to entertain visions of high command in India, and after Omdurman had petrified an Under-Secretary at the India Office by coming in to record a wish to be considered as candidate for the office of Military Member of the Viceroy's Council. Lord Curzon, made aware of Kitchener's aspiration, could not quite see him occupying the Military Member's office. "I am somewhat of a disturbing element in the placid economy of Indian administration," he wrote in September, 1899. "The appearance of another and even more seismic factor might produce unforeseen results."<sup>2</sup> Prophetic words! But curiously enough

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation "C.-in-C." will henceforth be used for this term.

<sup>2</sup> Ronaldshay, *Curzon*, II, p. 109.

Curzon was eager to welcome Kitchener as C.-in-C. Perhaps this was due to two causes. First, he was convinced that no man, not gifted with a fresh mind and a dynamic personality, could hope to deal with the arrears of reform long overdue in the Indian army: secondly, he nurtured an impish desire to impose Kitchener on the large section of the Indian army already quivering at the rumour of the arrival of a C.-in-C. not possessing any Indian experience. He reported to the Secretary of State that the acting C.-in-C. was already speaking of "Kitchener of Chaos" and predicting general disaster.

On the other hand, there was a movement afoot to induce Kitchener to take up a post at the War Office—if not some high command at home. "The occasion is unique," wrote the Secretary of State for War. "The chance of re-organizing the army is not likely to recur in your lifetime, or mine, under similar conditions. . . . If it influences you at all, I may say I have not taken the War Office with a view to half-measures. . . ." But Kitchener would have none of it. "'Nenni!' said the Cat. 'I am the Cat who walks by himself, and all places are alike to me. I will not come.'" Or in his own words, as he explained in a letter: "Wyndham suggests my going to the War Office. I would sooner sweep a crossing. . . . I have no intention of going to the War Office in any capacity; so if India goes to anyone else I shall have what I really want—a good long rest, and perhaps it will be the end of my military career. . . . Regarding the work, it is not easy to explain, but I should be a hopeless failure at the War Office under the existing administration."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless he knew perfectly well that adminis-

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, II, p. 119.

trative methods in India would be little better—if at all—than those which he imagined to be intolerable at home. Lord Curzon himself had already written to him: “I regard military administration in India as bound up in interminable writing and over-centralization, from which I have been doing my best to relieve it.” Very soon Kitchener was to complain of the awful system of writing minutes which seemed to him to form the essence of the Government of India.

Now the control of the forces in India was vested in two authorities: firstly the C.-in-C., and secondly the Military Member of the Viceroy’s Council. The latter—he was the lesser personage—was, after a fashion, the equivalent of the Secretary of State for War at home. Yet he was normally no more than a major-general of the Indian army, this status being necessary since the Military Member had executive control of the supply, transport, remount and ordnance branches. In addition he represented the Viceroy in, and dealt with, all matters referred to that authority by the C.-in-C. Accordingly since the Viceroy was a civilian the Military Member had slowly but surely, for a variety of reasons, come to exercise an increasing control over the C.-in-C.’s measures submitted either for the Viceroy’s approval or for financial sanction. Under a temporary and amiable C.-in-C. the Military Member’s intervention in all army matters had grown apace. Such was the system known as Dual Control, which had been leading to the unsatisfactory relations prevalent between the Viceroy and the military authorities.

As a further inflammatory cause must be added the fact that Lord Curzon himself had encouraged this acrid feeling by word and deed. In the first place, he mistrusted soldiers; he made light of their methods of

bought, their ways of doing business and all their prejudices. Secondly, he had given mortal offence by his action in two notorious incidents in which natives had died as the result of fracas with British troops. The first had occurred at Rangoon in 1900 when, after deplorable mismanagement, a British battalion was punished at the Viceroy's own instance by transfer to Aden, in addition to other disciplinary measures. Again, in 1902 a somewhat similar incident affected a very popular regiment, the British 9th Lancers. In this matter Curzon's attitude and judgment led to a public demonstration in favour of the regiment at a great public ceremony. Both incidents had rankled. Such was the setting of the stage.

With the additional impulse given to his cause by Lord Roberts himself and by the Secretary of State for War, Mr. St. John Brodrick, there was no question of Kitchener's being employed anywhere else but as C.-in-C. in India. Finally he landed in India on 28th November, 1902, to be welcomed by Curzon in no half-hearted fashion. On 3rd December Curzon wrote of Kitchener to Lord George Hamilton in these terms: "We had long, confidential and most friendly talks, and he greatly impressed me by his honesty, directness, frank commonsense and combination of energy with power. I feel that at last I shall have a C.-in-C. worthy of the name and position." Three months later there was no change: "Kitchener is mad keen about everything here. I never met so concentrated a man. He uses an argument. You answer him. He repeats it. You give a second reply, even more cogent than the first. He repeats it again. You demolish him. He repeats it without alteration a third time. But he is as agreeable as he is obstinate, and everyone here likes

."<sup>1</sup> So far, then, it was roses, roses, all the way. But below the surface the ulcer lay ready to break. Already, before Kitchener had left England, the shadow of coming events had fallen across his path. In the spring of 1901 Major-General Smith-Dorrien, former commander of the 19th Brigade at Paardeberg, had been specially selected by Lord Roberts for appointment of Adjutant-General in India, with a view to introducing into the Indian army the fruits of his experiences of the South African War. No sooner had Smith-Dorrien taken up his new post, than he was drawn into the inter-departmental struggle that was being carried on between the C.-in-C. and the Military Member's Department in India. The situation was, in effect, growing so much worse that any attempt at reform or innovation initiated by the C.-in-C. was certain of being stifled by the strict control exercised by even very junior officers of the Military Member's staff. Smith-Dorrien found his position becoming untenable. All his attempts at reform were strangled at birth. In addition, he was meeting with daily and tangible proof that the feelings subsisting between the Viceroy, together with his civilian advisers, and the army as a whole were thoroughly bad. This hit the Adjutant-General, who was responsible for the discipline of the troops, very hard; so much so that, as Smith-Dorrien put it, "after struggling for eleven months, flapping against the bars of my cage, I decided finally that my position was intolerable, that I was drawing pay under false pretences, and I tendered my resignation". The most irksome point at issue was that the Viceroy had shown on repeated occasions how far he distrusted the soldier to the corresponding advantage of the natives.

<sup>1</sup> Ronaldshay, *Curzon*, II, p. 251.

So far had this process been carried that the British private in India had abandoned his hitherto favourite recreation of shooting in the nearest jungle. To show his feelings in the matter, every barrack-room sweeper would be addressed with mock courtesy and by the title of "Mister George Nathaniel".

But Sir Power Palmer implored Smith-Dorrien not to desert him. A stormy meeting over the question of rewards for the Waziristan "blockade" added fresh fuel to the quarrel. It was alleged that the Viceroy, anxious to proclaim to the world that no frontier war had interrupted his peaceful reign, had decided to camouflage the "small war" of 1902 in Waziristan by styling it a "blockade". The sequel to this dispute decided Smith-Dorrien to proceed to England forthwith so as to interview Lord Kitchener, then due to arrive in India in two months' time, and set his grievances and his resignation before him. "Taking a budget of précis of all the vexed cases which had occurred in my time, including the two I have quoted vetoing the C.-in-C.'s requests (1) to increase the number of camels in cavalry regiments, and (2) to institute the principle of promotion examinations, I reached London in August and sought out Lord Kitchener. I shall never forget that masterful man's face as I read and explained to him case after case. He fairly gasped out, 'Is this the sort of thing I have got to compete with?' I have dealt pretty fully with this subject as Lord Kitchener has been accused of having gone to India with the firm intention of smashing the Military Department without possessing any real knowledge of their methods."<sup>1</sup>

Thus it was that Kitchener's eyes were opened as to the true state of affairs in India. Ill-fortune willed that

<sup>1</sup> Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of 48 Years' Service*, Ch. XXI, *passim*.

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he should encounter a man of real merit, so redoubtable and self-willed, as Lord Curzon in a matter and in manner of this kind. Curzon had in many respects proved a remarkable Viceroy, hard-working and conscientious to a degree. It is lamentable that the record of a great Viceroyalty should have been marred by the disagreement with the army and still more by the quarrel with the C.-in-C. Neither protagonist therein can be absolved from the reproach of having indulged in display of personal feeling; it can at least be said of Kitchener that he received considerable provocation.

The first rift was not long in coming. But it was with amusement rather than resentment that Curzon first observed the new C.-in-C.'s characteristic maiden efforts. On 13th January he was writing home to Kitchener "seems to think that the military government of India is to be conducted by concordat between him and me. Accordingly he comes and pours out to me all sorts of schemes to which he asks my consent. It is all so frank and honest and good-tempered that one cannot meet these advances with a rebuff. Here and there I head him off or steer him into more orthodox channels. But of course, as yet he does not know the ropes."<sup>1</sup> Soon Kitchener was actually broaching the acute subject of the Military Member to Curzon, who persuaded him to wait for one year before beginning to pull the Indian military system to pieces.

Kitchener next turned to Lord Roberts on the same subject. In the end Lord Roberts, although he had at times and in the past criticized dual control, expressed himself freely in favour of retaining the prevailing system. It is possible that in Lord Roberts's days the system had never been quite so inquisitorial nor so irksome. Any

<sup>1</sup> Ronaldshay, *Curzon*, II, p. 351 *et seq.* See Chap. XXVII, *passim*.

now, Kitchener's attitude led to a coolness between himself and Roberts that lasted some little time. Then like an April shower the difference cleared, and the two were intimate friends again.

Nevertheless, in India, on Kitchener's side at least, the matter was not to be dropped; the virus was only incubating. "He abominates our files and departmental methods of working," wrote Lord Curzon, adding in his inimitable style: "in fact he is just like a caged lion stalking to and fro and dashing its bruised and lacerated head against the bars." A squabble soon arose with the Military Member. Kitchener wished to form a number of native field artillery batteries. So revolutionary a proposal straightway led to a personal encounter with Sir Edmond Elles. But Kitchener could not, or would not, discuss matters with the Military Member: rather than do so he dropped his scheme. "He stands aloof," wrote Curzon, once more in his very own manner, "and alone, a molten mass of devouring energy and burning ambitions without anybody to control or guide it in the right direction." Throughout 1903 the storm was gathering. There were threats of resignation. But Kitchener, although he made a mistake or two, managed to keep on friendly terms with Curzon, who, once more, could write: "Ever since, I have been expecting the resignation of Elles which would have been an appropriate balance to that of Kitchener the week before. I must say I feel my position most deeply. . . . I provide a Tom Tiddler's ground on which these two turkey-cocks fight out their weekly combats, each clamouring to get me on his side, and threatening me with resignation if I take the other."

It must be admitted that Kitchener now embarked on a relentless campaign against the Military Member

## LORD KITCHENER

justice to Lord Curzon it should be emphasize  
with the exception of the thorny subject of ~~the~~  
he gave Kitchener much assistance while never  
ing to obstruct any of the C.-in-C.'s real  
reforms. On 9th July, 1903, he was saying  
tchener "is out with me here in camp at ~~this~~  
and not a cloud flecks the sky. . . . He now  
his mistake and is aware that I am his best

central fact in the situation now became the  
aching close of Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty, which  
minate at the end of 1904. How far Kitchener  
the end of Curzon's régime approaching, was bid.  
opportunity would be difficult to determine: he  
ever very communicative. Probably that know.  
conduced to moderation. But the crash was not far  
Curzon received an extension of two years in  
ceroyalty and proceeded to England on leave in  
1904, before entering on the new term of office.  
th June, when attending a meeting of the Com.  
of Imperial Defence, he was faced with a paper  
tted in the normal course of duty by Kitchener  
e defence of India. In this paper every drawback  
very weakness in the military situation in India  
scribed to the curse of dual control. From these  
ments was drawn the conclusion that the Military  
rtment must be suppressed. Curzon was staggered,  
aturally enough would not accept such an opinion.  
aimed that the point raised was not confined to  
ce matters, but encroached upon a constitutional  
which he must deal with in Council in India. The  
r was therefore withdrawn from discussion, and  
quently the problem of dual control was shelved.  
Curzon's advocates have implied that Kitchener

had been lying in wait for Curzon's absence to spring his mine under him. But it can scarcely have been so, for would he have sent such a document to London at the very moment when Curzon would be at home and thus enjoy the immense advantage of personal access to the British Government?

Kitchener, vexed beyond measure at such treatment of his strongly worded report, waited two months and then tendered his resignation. This promised to arouse a popular storm. The Prime Minister, therefore, ordered the matter to be referred to the Viceroy's Council: Kitchener, relying on this promise of an investigation of his contention, withdrew his resignation. At the close of 1904 Curzon returned to India; but the great question was not placed before the Council for another three months.

Three memoranda were printed and circulated to all members of the Council. The first, by Kitchener, stated his case in full. The second, by Sir Edmond Elles, rebutted the C.-in-C.'s arguments. The third, by the Viceroy himself, began, like a Public Oration at Oxford with a flattering summary of Kitchener's work in India in which he was styled "one of the foremost living masters of the science of military government as well as of the art of war"; but it ended with a declaration that he believed Kitchener to be attempting "to subvert the authority of the Government of India and to substitute for it a military autocracy in the person of the C.-in-C.; . . . with great reluctance but without hesitation I am compelled to advise against the acceptance of the C.-in-C.'s proposal." In addition various other despatches and minutes were circulated at a meeting before the Council assembled at Calcutta on 10 March, 1905. From the outset the meeting w

army was known to need reorganization. With the Russo-Japanese War just reaching its close, the moment did not appear propitious for the removal from India of a C.-in-C. of proved capacity. On the other hand, Lord Curzon was a great power in the land. But he was known to be "difficult", and the Prime Minister was quite prepared to see him leave India. In the end, and after some hesitation during which the Government even sought the advice of Lord Cromer, regarding him as a great authority in matters of overseas government,<sup>1</sup> a compromise was sought and found. Lord Lansdowne in the House of Lords made the following statement on behalf of the Government: "We found ourselves in the position of having to decide between the demand of Lord Kitchener that the office of Military Member should be absolutely put an end to, and the view of the Government of India that it should be preserved and that he should remain very much in the position which he had always occupied, and we decided against Lord Kitchener." But in practice that decision was not quite so definite, nor did it satisfy either party, particularly Lord Curzon. The Secretary of State for India on 31st May, 1905, convened a committee, of which Lord Roberts was a member, and after listening to their advice, communicated the Government's decision to India. The Military Member was not to be suppressed; but he would deal only with the quasi-civil side of army administration, contracts, stores, ordnance, remounts and military works. He would be known as the Member for Military Supply. In particular his interference in and criticism of purely military details emanating from the C.-in-C. would cease.

Lord Curzon read the significance of the decision

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cromer supported the Government of India.

## LORD KITCHENER

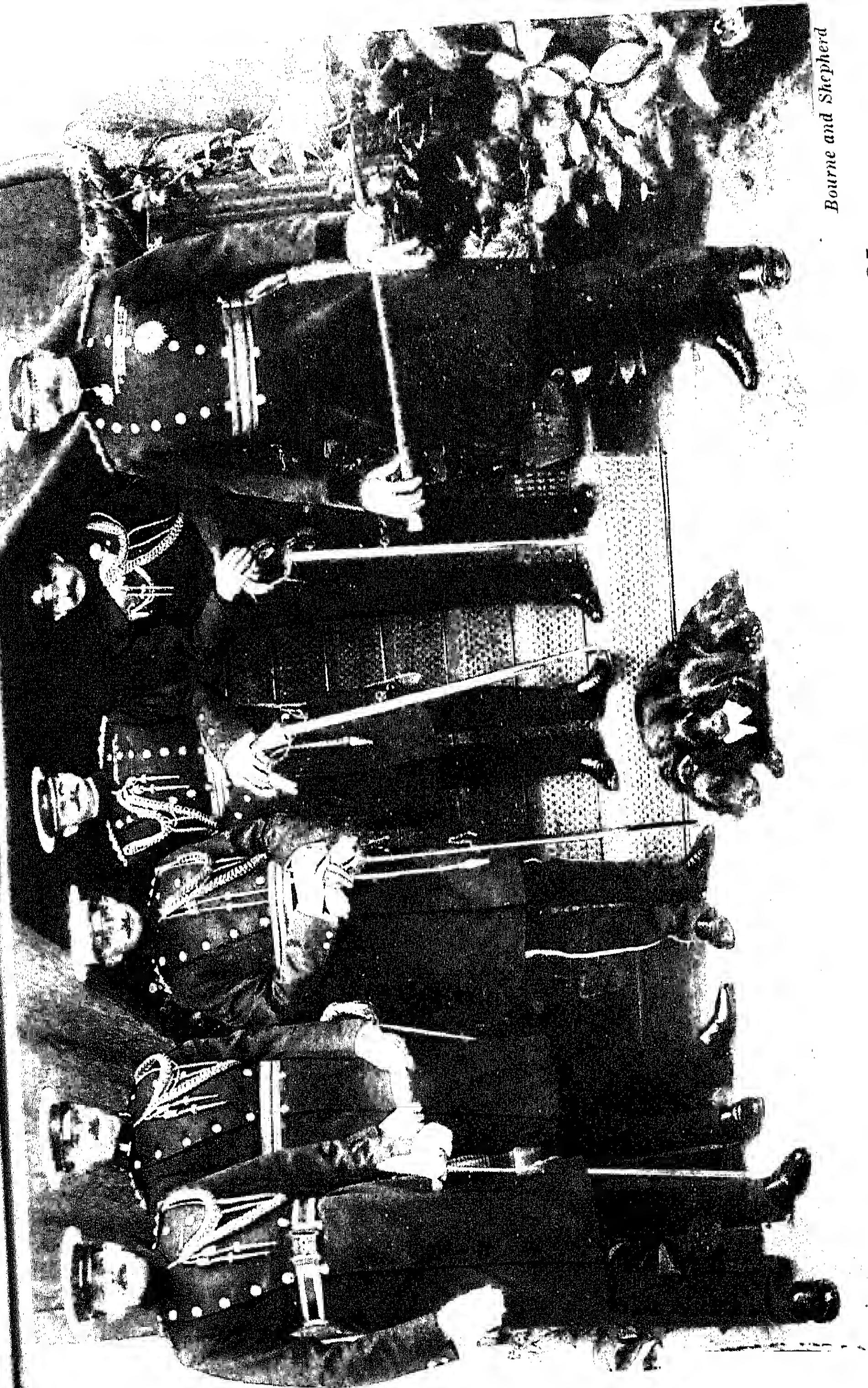
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ight. He could scarcely conceal his chagrin that the Government had in the end decided against him. "I am under no illusion as to the result," he wrote. He has practically triumphed, although a disempowered Military Member has been left to prevent me from resigning." The next weeks were spent by Curzon and Kitchener, meeting officially at rare intervals, in elaborating a scheme for the future position and work of the Military Supply Member. To Curzon's stupefaction Kitchener seemed disposed to compromise so far that he might be thought ready to give away all that he had just gained. The truth is he now felt secure and could afford to be generous. Then some bickering set in between Curzon and the British Government as to the actual function of the Military Supply Member. Curzon was evidently hankering to revert to the *status quo*. Finally the Viceroy was informed that the occupant of the new office would be nominated at home and sent to India. This was a blow, since Curzon had just made out a strong case for the appointment of his own nominee to the post. He regretted that he could not accept such a ruling, and then went on to offer his resignation of the Viceroyalty. This the Prime Minister accepted.

*Note.*—For further remarks on this controversy see Appendix No. I.

LORD KITCHENER AND HIS PERSONAL STAFF IN INDIA, 1905

*Bourne and Shepherd*





## INDIAN ARMY REFORM

LONG before Kitchener arrived in India the question of Army Reform had become urgent. Delay in its initiation was perhaps all the more comprehensible once certain of its aspects must involve changes that were fundamental and far-reaching: so the issues were hirked. As far back as 1879 Sir Ashley Eden had presided over a Committee for Army Reform on which Sir Frederick (later Lord) Roberts had played a leading part.<sup>1</sup> Many details recommended by that Committee had been carried into effect: although it was not until 1895 that the fusion of the three separate Presidential armies, a main issue before the Committee, became an accomplished fact. Lord Roberts, as C.-in-C., had done much, particularly in the matter of training and of the well-being of the soldier, to introduce much-needed changes. Progress had been made, if slowly.

But the tradition of an expensive and complicated administration bequeathed by the existence of separate Presidential forces survived. The distribution and chain of command of the actual troops were still influenced by needs of Internal Security, as felt directly after the Indian Mutiny. Yet conditions had altered very far since those days; whilst railways, roads and the electric telegraph had effected a veritable revolution in the domain of communications. Some drastic redistribution

<sup>1</sup> For the views of that Committee relative to Dual Control, see Appendix I.

of the troops was therefore not only possible but positively desirable.

Kitchener arrived on the scene unhampered by any tradition and with a determination to take in hand a reorganization of the army that would answer the needs of a major foreign war: for he would consider the entire problem only from the standpoint of war and not from the conveniences of peace administration. Further, he proposed to relegate Internal Security to a secondary plane; that is, to regard it as a necessary evil and to reduce the claims imposed thereby on the time and presence of the troops to an irreducible minimum. He therefore assumed the main task of the Indian army to be the defeat of any invasion coming from across the North-West Frontier, and on that hypothesis he proceeded to base all his schemes. It would even appear possible that he entertained visions of the Indian army being employed for Imperial purposes outside India. That, however, was not likely to be a view acceptable to the authorities, and he never appears to have stressed any of such personal opinions in public.

Another weighty consideration was the necessity of rendering India independent of Great Britain with regard to reinforcements or military material on an outbreak of war. At one moment Kitchener seems to have relied on the belief that, in the event of need, a force of eight divisions could be sent from home to India. But when it grew obvious that the arrival of such reinforcements could only be regarded as highly improbable, if not utterly impracticable, he based his plans on making India self-supporting for a considerable period of time. The interruption of regular traffic with Europe should therefore not be allowed to paralyse the conduct of a war for the defence of India. Finally

INDIAN.  
king into account the most probable nature of hostilities, in which India might herself be involved, namely, a Russian aggression into Afghanistan, he decided that the Indian army must be prepared to come to the support of, and to enter, Afghanistan by the two natural gateways into that country, namely the Khyber road to Kabul and the southern passes to Kandahar. Any other eventuality could be met, as and when it arose, with greater ease if only the Divisions of the army were so organized as to be ready to move according to a carefully studied plan as complete units without any avoidable readjustments as to personnel, equipment and transport.

Kitchener therefore enumerated four principles on which his Army Reform was to be based:

1. That the main function of the army was to defend the North-West Frontier against an aggressive enemy.
2. That the army in peace should be organized, distributed and trained in units and formations similar to those in which it would take the field in war.
3. That the maintenance of Internal Security was a means to an end; namely to set free the field army to carry out its functions.
4. That all fighting units, in their several spheres, should be equally capable of carrying out all the rôles of an army in the field, and that all should be given an equal chance in experience and training to bear these rôles.<sup>1</sup>

The first step was to make himself familiar with the whole of the North-West Frontier zone. This he did in characteristic fashion. In January, 1903, he began his travels round Tank, Wana and Bannu, ending next month with the Khyber Pass, Malakand and Chakdara.

<sup>1</sup> Maurice, *General Lord Rawlinson*, p. 273.

## LORD KITCHENER

Two more tours took him from Quetta round by Nushki and into every valley between Baluchistan and the Hindu-Kush. In the autumn he concluded with a visit to the northern sector as far as Gilgit and Chitral to the Amirs. It was a test of endurance as much as a tour of inspection. The greater part of the journeys lay over bad tracks where certain stretches could only be done on foot. But it was a remarkable experience and allowed the new C.-in-C. to gather opinions from all available experts in a manner that hardly one of his predecessors had ever attempted. The next step was to consider the troops that might be called upon to wage war in those regions.

Here Kitchener was struck by the fact that, although the three Presidential armies had disappeared and four commands had been substituted for them, the previous organization had left an unsavoury legacy behind. For historical reasons the Presidential forces of Bombay and Madras had come to be regarded as of inferior value in war, largely because they had enjoyed so few opportunities for gaining distinction on active service. This must be cured. In fact, even the India Office had already thrown out hints that some such reorganization might be desirable. So Kitchener soon had schemes in hand for doing away with all regimental titles and designations that might contribute, by past association or otherwise, to cast any derogatory imputation as to a regiment's fitness for war. At the same time old and honoured titles must be revived. A simultaneous renumbering of regiments was taken in hand so as to unify the army. The last measure was combined with another important step calculated to improve the fighting efficiency of the army, namely the complete elimination of units raised from unwarlike races and sul-

stituting for them new regiments recruited from among hardier populations. This entailed the conversion of nine Madrasis into Punjabi regiments and five others into Gurkhas. Although only an extension of the process that had been set in motion after the Mutiny, few of Kitchener's reforms occasioned more regrets.

In November, 1903, appeared the memorandum dealing with "The Reorganization and Redistribution of the Army in India". This was supplemented in January, 1904, by the sister memorandum "The Preparation of the Army in India for War". These two papers contained Kitchener's main proposals, which were to do away with the four existing "commands" into which the army was divided and to substitute in their place two "armies". By a revision of the garrisons and duties of troops employed on tasks of Internal Security, it should be found possible to increase the number of divisions available for service in the field from four to nine. Of these nine divisions, five, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 7th and 8th divisions, would compose the northern army; four, the 4th, 5th, 6th and 9th, the southern army. The whole distribution of the peace stations of these nine divisions were so revised as to render their mobilization and transport to their war concentration areas not only as rapid as possible, but also practicable without breaking up any peace-time formation. The natural direction for the forward movement of the northern army was to be Kabul; that of the southern army Kandahar. Thus the whole conception was logical from beginning to end.

Outside the scheme there stood the three independent frontier brigades—the Kohat, Bannu and Derajat Brigades—the Burma division, and certain "army troops" and the Aden garrison.

This creation was not achieved at a stroke of the pen. It took some time before it reached finality. There were also many adjustments to be made. But in the main it can be said that Kitchener's redistribution was more or less complete by 1907. In the meantime the scheme was blessed by the Secretary of State in London, and an Indian Army Order was issued on 28th October, 1904, whereby the new scheme came into being.

The effects on administration and training proved considerable. Divisional and brigade commanders were better able to supervise the training of their troops, while they could be invested with greater powers and more responsibility. Moreover, as several military stations could be abandoned as unnecessary in the new conception of Internal Security, troops were brought into more healthy garrisons that were better adapted to the needs of modern training.

To complete his plans for transporting the armies to the Afghan borders Kitchener wished to perfect the railway system, on which his scheme was based, by the construction of certain sections of line that would facilitate the strategic deployment and the maintenance of his armies in those regions. But here he failed to carry his ideas into practice. First for fear of alienating the Amir Habibullah, and then by reason of technical difficulties and of expense, delays accumulated until the whole of the outstanding plans were throttled under the plea of economy by Mr. Morley, the Secretary of State.

In one respect Kitchener's work may be said to have proved a failure. When trial was made of his plan to give all troops a turn of service on the Frontier, it soon grew obvious that the scheme would only encourage tribal unrest. The Pathan is an expert at rifle-

thieving and all other forms of frontier knavery and rapine. No sooner did he discover that the well-tried regiments that had kept the peace had been replaced by the Frontier by novices, than his audacity exceeded all previously known limits. The experiment was discontinued and only the regiments of long Frontier experience were henceforth maintained on that restless border.

An inevitable consequence of Kitchener's redistribution of the Indian army was felt in the form of a shortage of staff officers. No machinery existed for the provision of a necessary supply. Accordingly Kitchener proposed to found a Staff College for India. The Indian Government concurred, but the Home authorities feared that such a foundation "might create a separate school of thought and increase the existing diversities of military opinion." "The army has no military school of thought," retorted Kitchener; "I wish there was more thoughtful research, and more effort to base opinions on well-digested knowledge." He further expressed the firm desire that the new Indian college should be a counterpart of the older institution at Camberley. He pressed the matter, since he knew that many officers could not afford to go home for two years; others would not contemplate losing touch with India where their future lay. "A young officer gets fond of his surroundings and his sport, and does not like such a break in his life which also costs him money, unless he has some special reasons for it. . . . What officers dread is the outside expenses in England."<sup>1</sup> So the new college was started first at Deolali in July, 1905; subsequently in permanent buildings at Quetta in June, 1907. The scheme proved a success.

<sup>1</sup> Godwin Austen, *The Staff and the Staff College*, Chap. IX.

Not only in the staffs did a shortage of British officers exist. Throughout the Indian regiments the same lack was just as acutely felt as Kitchener's reforms began to take shape. By every means in his power he sought to remedy what amounted to a serious weakness. But the palliatives nearly all cost money; so it was not without a struggle that he obtained several minor concessions calculated to ease the lot of the British officer in India and thus to attract more candidates for Indian army commissions.

In the matter of promoting commissioned Indian officers to higher ranks Kitchener was more guarded. For twenty years the question had been discussed and normally dismissed as impracticable. When Mr. Morley proposed that a certain number of regiments should be officered chiefly by Indians, he found Kitchener not altogether unresponsive. He had evidently studied the question for long past, and he had the analogy of the Egyptian army whereon to base any opinions. He favoured the experiment but advised great caution; and he made it a definite condition that a Military College be founded, for the training of selected candidates. But he was firm, very firm indeed, in his insistence that any such innovation should never be associated with any political concession. In the meantime he was equally decided to cause all British ranks of the army in India to behave with the greatest courtesy to all Indian soldiers whatever their rank might be.

Political agitation, ever a nightmare to those in authority in India, began to assume a more ugly form in 1907. To Kitchener the manifestations of that year caused some preoccupation. They served in some measure as a touchstone as to how far his reforms might seem to stand the test of seditious attacks. But the

army emerged from the ordeal unharmed. In May Kitchener himself could write to Sir John Maxwell, "the army is, I think, all right—one or two regiments are not quite satisfactory; and of course all this cannot go on without affecting the native soldier more or less. But, on the whole, I see no cause to suppose there is any disaffection of a serious nature. There are a few individual cases, however—which is not surprising considering the persistent attempts the agitators have made to tamper with their loyalty." Only one sepoy, a Sikh was tried under the Indian articles of war for sedition.

One of the last measures adopted by Lord Morley which affected Kitchener, was the final abolition in January, 1909, of the Military Member for Supply on the Viceroy's Council. After gradually coming to be regarded as a fifth wheel to the coach, that official fell under the ban of the economy axe. Thus did the last symbol of the historic controversy between Viceroy and C.-in-C. disappear.

## CHAPTER X

### LORD MINTO AND LORD MORLEY

ONCE more an effort was made, in 1905, to draw Kitchener to the War Office. It was Lord Esher who tried to inveigle him into accepting the post of Chief of the General Staff on the Army Council newly constituted at the recommendation of the famous Esher Committee. A field-marshall's baton, an enhanced salary, a position to be adapted to his peculiar gifts, such was the bait dangled before his eyes. But Kitchener was not to be tempted. On 15th August, he replied:

"Patriotic convictions, my very dear Lord Esher, have led many men to commit great follies and will, I presume, continue to do so in the future.

"You must pardon me for this opening in answer to this letter, rather in the style of Marmaduke to Lady Betty, but what I want to impress upon you is that it would take a deal to convince me now that it was my patriotic duty to accept the post of C. of G. S. Why? Because I should fail! I think I know what I can do as well as my limitations. I can, I believe, impress to a certain extent my personality on men working under me, I am vain enough to think that I can lead them, but I have no silver tongue to persuade. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

Mr. Brodrick, too, who had exchanged the War Office for the Indian Secretariat in London, renewed

<sup>1</sup> Lord Esher, *Journals*, II, p. 98.

his blandishments—but all in vain. He could only conclude with the inspired declaration: “After every one has failed [at the War Office] there will be a call for some one, and you will not be able to avoid the War Office for ever!”

So he remained in India, where Lord Curzon was succeeded as Viceroy by Lord Minto in November, 1905. Not many days later Mr. Balfour, with his Conservative Government, resigned and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman assumed office in his place. The new Secretary of State for War was Mr. R. B. (later Lord) Hal dane, while the India Office passed to Mr. John (later Lord) Morley. With the new Viceroy Kitchener soon found himself in complete harmony. But Mr. Morley was a type of character with whom Kitchener could never have much in common. A Liberal of the old school, stubborn in his anti-military faith, Mr. Morley was not one who was likely ever to moderate his cherished beliefs.<sup>1</sup> From the very outset he made it plain that he intended to cut down military expenditure. This naturally enough came as an unwelcome blow to Kitchener, who was still in the midst of his army reorganization plans in India and needed money for their completion. His great concern was therefore to enlist Mr. Morley’s known sympathy for the cause of economy and to justify his schemes on that score. Much correspondence took place on that topic between the C.-in-C. and the Secretary of State.

It was not long before Mr. Morley began to propose making inroads on military funds. He pleaded the possibility of reducing all army expenditure on the grounds of the outcome of the Russo-Japanese War.

<sup>1</sup>In 1914 Lord Morley resigned office rather than be a party to the declaration of war against Germany.

Since Russia had suffered so severe a set-back, he argued, what need could there be to guard against the menace on the North-West Frontier? Kitchener could not quite accept that view in all its implications. He believed that the victory of Japan had awakened ideas in oriental minds that had previously been undreamed of, and that any weakening of the Indian military apparatus must remain inadvisable. He suspected Afghanistan to be arming heavily and, if freed from the Russian bogey, to be capable of threatening India. Not so long after, he began to wonder whether Germany might not become a factor in the situation: although he never, except very vaguely, made known what his thoughts might be on that score. But Mr. Morley was not to be denied. At intervals he began to make suggestions for economies in the Indian military budget that grew more definite as time went on. Since Kitchener was adamant on the matter of not reducing the extent of his changes, he might be prepared to see them delayed or sacrificed in minor details. Inevitably the realization of several of his innovations or reforms was postponed. But the honesty and directness of Mr. Morley were unquestionable. The two men certainly had one common bond—economy. Kitchener, perhaps, so far understood this motive that he quite respected Mr. Morley, even if he did not agree with him.

Still, if the relations with Mr. Morley proved in a sense disappointing, the same could not be said of the pleasant association which Kitchener maintained with Lord Minto. A very few weeks after his arrival Lord Minto could say: "I confess I have been very much puzzled as to the opinion of Kitchener which is so prevalent both in India and at home. It seems so often to be assumed that he is overbearing, self-seeking, and

difficult to deal with. One can only speak of people as one finds them, and all I can say is that I find him very broad-minded, very ready to see both sides of a question, and perfectly easy to deal with, whilst his minutes on the questions we have to consider since I have been here have been much the ablest and most moderate I have had before me. Of course he has strong opinions, and no doubt is inclined to speak of them, but so far I have found him perfectly ready to look at things from different points of view."<sup>1</sup> Such was the verdict that Lord Minto put before Mr. Morley. A similar opinion seems to have been held of Kitchener by many who came into direct contact with him for the first time. General Smith-Dorrien, indeed, thought highly of his company: ". . . he was most interesting and instructive and much less secretive than I had imagined. He discussed every sort of question openly with me and told me his views, always searching and far-reaching. He had a fascinating habit, when he was considering a question, of speaking his thoughts, arguing with himself all the pros and cons, then summing up and coming to a decision."<sup>2</sup> And not a few others held a like opinion of him.

After the disappearance of Lord Curzon, Kitchener himself had been inclining to take life more easily. There were valid reasons for some slight relaxation of effort: although eventually the process went further. Late in 1903 Kitchener had met with a severe riding accident at Simla which left him on the ground with a leg badly shattered above the ankle. From the effects of this mishap he recovered satisfactorily, but his former remarkable capacity for walking never returned, whilst he

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Arthur, II, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of 48 Years' Service*, p. 319.

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nervous as to the soundness of the limb.<sup>1</sup> But there is no doubt that the enthusiasm of the earlier days in India was chilled as the economizing grip of Mr. Morley began to check the realization of army plans. Progress was growing far more sedate. Climate, that insidious robber of intellectual vigour, may have sapped even Kitchener's portentous energy, for he had prepared himself in the heat of India from that first month when he had carried out his phenomenal tour of the North-West Frontier. After all, some relaxation must have been hardly earned. Since he had become Sirdar in 1892 his work had been continuous and had carried him through some five years of war, during which the bulk of his responsibility had been the greater since he had borne them so largely alone. In 1907, then, when an extension of his period of command was suggested by high places, and Mr. Morley seemed anxious for Kitchener to remain at his post, the latter pleaded the need of a rest and a sea voyage before taking up the proposed extension. But circumstances were not favourable: so he remained. But attacks of malarial fever recurred, and physically he was a weaker man.

The last two years of Kitchener's command went by unmarked by any incident. The rule of the Viceroy, Lord Minto, was placid and agreeable. Kitchener devoted much leisure to horticulture, and gave free rein to his collector's passion for oriental porcelain. He had already transformed his official residence: countless files of obsolete correspondence were reduced to pulp and pressed into all shapes of friezes and mouldings to decorate a new ballroom. His entertainments became

After this accident Lord Kitchener always had his left riding boot laced up the inside. After being put on it was then laced up from ankle to toe. One such boot may be seen in the Imperial War Museum.

famous. Still he went on improving the amenities of his houses, and even levelled two hills that impeded his view. At Calcutta he would exhibit orchids from his gardens: whilst at Simla precious porcelains were being sent up for his inspection.

Periodic ceremonial tours began to play a greater part in Kitchener's official life. More leisure was devoted to visits to the Indian Princes. It is said that on such visits he travelled some 40,000 miles. The entertainments, state ceremonies and shooting parties that formed part of these trips he enjoyed to the full. Of pheasant or grouse shooting, as practised at home, he knew nothing: nor was he anything more than a very moderate shot. But tiger hunting attracted him greatly: so he indulged that fancy without hindrance.

Of the great ceremonies which Kitchener attended in his official capacity none was more significant than those held to celebrate the visit of the Amir Habibullah of Afghanistan at Agra in the spring of 1907. Everything went off well. The Amir was delighted and spent a fortune. But Kitchener saw a more serious side to all these junketings. The problem of Afghanistan was that which had puzzled him more than any in his dealings with the North-West Frontier. In his estimation British prestige could never stand too high at Kabul. So he spared no effort to impress the Amir with the military might of Britain in India. Reviews on a lavish scale were organized and the Amir was duly impressed. Kitchener himself made a great friend of the Afghan ruler, and he was invited to go to Kabul to review the Afghan forces.

Calcutta was the last stage of the Amir's tour. There he spent money furiously, buying anything from toys to a 300-foot girder bridge. When he left Kitchener

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The Amir was so overcome he could not speak. The evening before his departure he had insisted on dining with the C.-in-C. Shortly after 10 p.m. he was informed that everything was ready for his return journey. But at first he would not. The sight of a watch being pulled out caused him to snatch it out of the owner's hand. Nothing would induce him to go; he declared he would sleep on the floor if necessary. Eventually he said he could not depart before 1 a.m. The guard was dismissed and his retinue was nearing exhaustion. "I do not want them. Let them go," was all he could say. On being informed some were already asleep. He then sat down to the piano and sang, distributing autographed photographs at intervals. Finally at midnight Kitchener took him firmly by the hand and led him to his car.

After his departure he began a correspondence with Kitchener of which the following may serve as a specimen:

Kabul, 19. Zelkaida, 13<sup>25</sup>  
(25 December, 1907).

My dear and esteemed Friend, Lord Kitchener,

Your kind letter with Asparagrass Roots has duly reached me. According to the instructions enclosed in the letter the Roots were sown: hope they will grow and give the fruits! In your letter you have kindly mentioned that "according to my promises I send these Roots". My dear Friend, certainly I am also writing for your second promise to be fulfilled: and it was this—that you so kindly promised that you will try your best to get permission from the Indian Government to send workmen for making Cordite powder in the Afghan factories, on fixed pay, for the Afghan Government.

Now I am thanking your Excellency for the fulfilment of the first promise—that is sending me the Roots of Asparagrass. And I am very fond to thank you for the second promise also—that is to send a workman for making Cordite powder, after he arrives in Kabul on fixed pay, in Afghan Government service; because I see that the Afghan Government is in great need for making Cordite powder, and hope that because of my friend's (Your Excellency's) trying for me, will be successful in getting the workman.

Your Friend,

SIRASUL-MILLAT-I-WADDIN.

It needed all Kitchener's tact and finesse to stave off the Amir's request for "the workman"; for he did not quite agree with the urgency of setting up a cordite factory at Kabul. Nevertheless, the solid results of his entertainment of the Amir were never properly estimated until Habibullah had proved his loyalty to his British hosts by remaining strictly neutral throughout the years 1914-8. This was not the least of Kitchener's services to Britain or to India.

By means of such pomps and ceremonies, the gorgeous East, it would seem, was claiming its own. Yet for all that splendour the life which Kitchener had known in his younger days, the roving desert life, fundamentally appealed to him more. His thoughts must frequently have taken him back to the Arabs he had known as a subaltern in Palestine, Sinai and the Korosko Desert. India was an old-established land where inhabitants and customs moved in the narrower grooves of an older

civilization. The structure of Indian society was more rigid: it lacked the freedom of the sandy wastes that he had known in his earliest campaigns. So at times he hankered to go back to Cairo, to see the desert and the Beduin once more.

## CHAPTER XI

### EGYPT ONCE MORE

[N September, 1909, on completing his seven years' tenure of office, Kitchener left India, having very unwillingly, and only at the instance of King Edward VII himself, accepted the appointment of Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean. This most unsatisfactory position had been created, at the same time as the Committee of Imperial Defence, chiefly for the purpose of providing the Duke of Connaught with some high office in the State. Was Kitchener's appointment perhaps intended to keep him employed and out of England? Anyhow, the Government, and still more the War Office, may well have been nervous at the thought of the return of so powerful and uncompromising a personality.

Kitchener's own great ambition, however, was the Viceroyalty of India: he wished to succeed Lord Minto. He made no secret of it; but Lord Morley, fully aware of that openly avowed desire, was most guarded in his views as to such a selection. His rooted dislike of war and of all things military did not make him sympathetic. As Kitchener's departure from India was approaching, Lord Morley grew still less convinced: Kitchener, he surmised, was too volcanic. Yet Lord Minto could report that he considered Kitchener, in spite of statements to the contrary, "to be not impulsive and not reactionary, but cautious and progressive". On the

ther hand, he wrote that he was "idle and tired of India". "J. M. [Lord Morley] is not eager to appoint K. as Viceroy," thought Lord Esher, "but he would do so if Indian affairs go badly. . . ." <sup>1</sup> Nevertheless it would have taken a good deal to make Lord Morley accept a soldier. Early in 1910 he hardened his heart still further: he would not hear of Kitchener as Viceroy —even though India was reputed to be in a dangerous state—"as he has become hopelessly idle", wrote Lord Esher. The stories current as to Kitchener's idleness may have had some ground: even Lady Minto, when speaking of her discussion with Kitchener as to his prospects of succeeding Lord Minto, could say that she had asked him if he realized how ceaseless was the work of the Viceroy? Would she have dared to address such a remark to the Kitchener of the Sudan or of South Africa? Was it the influence of the East?

There was yet another prospect. Kitchener had always prided himself on a capacity for diplomacy. Ever since he had been Vice-Consul at Kastamuni in his young days he had imagined that a career in civil life or under the Foreign Office might suit his talents. His record was in fact noteworthy: Fashoda, Middleburg, Vereeniging, the victory over Curzon. So if not the Viceroyalty, why not some other great appointment in the diplomatic world? His past relations with the elder Lord Salisbury, and later with that statesman's family, strengthened the belief in such a destiny. More than once he had felt an inclination to propose himself for the Embassy at Constantinople. With sure instinct he foresaw the importance that Turkey must assume in any Oriental crisis. He believed in, and admired, the Turkish soldier: so he wished to make

<sup>1</sup> Lord Esher, *Journals*, II, p. 406.

sure of him in the event of a war: he would go to Constantinople, harness him to the British cause and reform the Turkish army in which he still held a commission as lieutenant-general. If not that, why, then, there was the British Agency at Cairo: this prospect too attracted him powerfully. But on the whole and at that moment it was the Viceroyalty of India which he coveted most.

With such thoughts as these in his mind he left India on a world tour, perhaps hoping that by the time of his return home some opening for his talents might be awaiting him. Past Singapore to Hong Kong, Shanghai and Peking: there were ceremonial visits, business and inspections to get through. But celebrated collections of oriental porcelain and curio-dealers' haunts were almost a greater attraction. Indeed, in his search for rare porcelains he could betray an impatient desire to acquire perfect and desirable specimens that verged on boyish greed; there were moments when the collector's eagerness to possess some priceless gem might prove embarrassing to his hosts and fellow-guests alike, while his taste was not unfailingly irreproachable.

Then on to Manchuria, where the battlefields of 1904-5 were visited under official Japanese guidance, and in such detail as time and the vast scale of the past operations permitted. Thence to Japan, where an almost regal welcome awaited him. But the products of Japanese art did not attract Kitchener as much as their Chinese equivalents. Japanese infantry, however, filled him with admiration. It was then that his old staff officer, later General Lord Rawlinson, who had come out to China to travel with him, first informed him of the "conversations" which the British and French General Staffs were then carrying on with a view to possible joint action against Germany. Kitchener disapproved

emphatically, "as we had no plan of our own and it would mean inevitably that we should be tacked on to a French plan which might not suit us".<sup>1</sup>

From Japan back to Hong Kong: thence via Java to Australia and New Zealand, where a serious official visit occupied the best part of two months. During his stay in Australia he had every opportunity of seeing the Defence Forces at work and then of advising the Australian and New Zealand authorities on the future development and training of their troops. The memorandum which he compiled on those subjects was an important document that had some bearing on the work of the Australian and New Zealand forces preparatory to their entry in the Great War; for he had meditated on their possible participation in any greater Imperial campaign. After all, Australian soldiers had found their way to Egypt and also to South Africa in his time: so why not again?

The great tour ended with the United States. From San Francisco through the Yosemite Valley he made his way to New York, where visits to West Point Academy and some celebrated collections of porcelain fascinated him as much as the beauties of New York. Canada he had no time to visit after his prolonged stay in Australia. Then home to London, where he arrived on 26th April. Shortly after his return he had an audience with King Edward, who presented him with the field-marshall's baton and—still more welcome—released him from the obligation to assume the Mediterranean command. If this indeed had been a prelude to the Viceroyalty of India, the King's unexpected death within a few days of that interview finally dashed Kitchener's best hopes, since it is possible that the

<sup>1</sup> Maurice, *Lord Rawlinson*, p. 96.

King's influence might have ensured his return to Simla as Viceroy. As it was, Lord Morley gave a little dinner party to Kitchener in order to test his fitness for the Viceroyalty: and it is told that Kitchener there ruined his last chance of the appointment by displaying the garrulity of a child. So the outbreak of the Great War eventually found him on leave in England and not in India.

A seat on the Imperial Defence Committee was the only employment offered to him. Some friends took him to see an old house named Broome standing between Canterbury and Folkestone. It was dated 1638 and attributed to Inigo Jones, with later work, standing in a park of 500 acres. Kitchener's artistic sense was immediately aroused. By heightening the reception rooms, reconstructing the bedrooms, what an admirable home he could make of it. He did not hesitate long but bought the house that was to be not only a home but a toy for his constructive and artistic tastes, a fine setting for his porcelains and a refuge in summer for his old age.

The winter was coming on: so with still no employment in view, Kitchener thought of the sunshine of Africa. For there was one thing in life that he dreaded: the winter cold of the English climate. Ever since his youth he had been remarkably susceptible to warmth. Long years in the East had rendered the vivifying effects of winter sunshine all but a necessity of life. So early in November he left London for Constantinople, where he found that "the German is allowed to do as he likes". Thinking it no place for one in his position, he went on to Alexandria and up the Nile, past Fashoda, Lado, to the Great African Lakes and on to Nairobi and Mombasa. There the climate caused him to join a

yndicate in the purchase of an estate where he proposed to spend winters to come.

From East Africa he was summoned back to London to command the troops at the Coronation of King George V. Not long after a vacancy arose for a new British Agent and Consul-General in Egypt. Since Lord Cromer had retired in 1908 this appointment had been held by Sir Eldon Gorst, for Lord Cromer, at the time of his departure, had not been sympathetic to the possibility of his own succession by Kitchener. Since then the situation had altered. Sir Eldon Gorst represented advanced Liberal views that favoured all Egyptian aspirations to complete autonomy. To achieve this end Gorst had practised a policy of self-effacement and a total renunciation of British rights. The result had left something to be desired, so that when Gorst fell hopelessly ill in England, Lord Cromer proffered the opinion that a firm hand would be necessary to retrieve the situation. Consequently, when consulted by the Foreign Office as to Gorst's successor, he unhesitatingly recommended Kitchener. That selection met with the approval of King George V, so in September Kitchener left London for Cairo.

No sooner had he arrived in Egypt than the Italo-Turkish War broke out. Great Britain declared herself strictly neutral and enjoined the same attitude on Egypt. Nevertheless, it was difficult to foresee how the Egyptian Government, and still more a population very mixed by race and by religion, might not react to the repercussions of that war. Various minor incidents took place, but fortunately nothing happened that might draw Egypt from a most correct attitude of neutrality. After one year of war the Treaty of Lausanne put an end to hostilities. Still this made little difference to the

situation in Tripoli, where Italians and Arabs continued an intermittent guerrilla campaign that was scarcely at an end when the Great War broke out in

1914.

The Italo-Turkish War was followed by the attack of the Balkan States on Turkey. Once again, following the example of Great Britain, Egypt was to remain strictly neutral. This attitude was effectively enforced under Kitchener's guidance.

In the meantime Kitchener's management of Egyptian internal affairs had aimed mainly at improving the well-being of the people. His chief interest lay in raising the standard of life of the peasantry, the long-suffering "fellahin" whom he, in the days of his Sirdarieh, had known so well in the ranks of the army. In his agrarian policy he strove above all else to encourage the growth of cotton. Partly owing to his strong direction and partly owing to the natural trend of events, his régime was marked by great prosperity. Nevertheless, he was oppressed by one source of considerable anxiety, namely, the undoubted hostility to England manifested by the Khedive Abbas. The irregularities which stood revealed in the administration of the affairs of the Waqf, which exercised the control of large funds destined to charitable and religious purposes, did not stand to Abbas's credit. His continued resistance to Kitchener's proposals for the formation of a single legislative chamber, combined with electoral reforms, further alienated the British Agent. Finally, the fact that he had disposed of the Mariut railway, the line running westwards from Alexandria towards Tripoli, to an Italian syndicate was more than the British Agent could countenance. Kitchener, therefore, determined that Abbas must abdicate. With that resolve in his heart, he

to Egypt on 15th June, 1914, to spend some leave in England.

To appreciate Kitchener's work in Egypt it is best have recourse to Lord Lloyd, who stated: "For the main direction and policy the people of Egypt ought have given him their lasting gratitude. His policy was to promote the material welfare of the fellahin. He had his own schemes for the purpose, and what interested him was that those schemes should be put into operation as little modified and with as little delay possible. Those schemes, however open to criticism in detail, were conceived on far-seeing lines and based on a clear insight into the needs of the situation. . . . questions relating to political progress he regarded either as routine duties or as fields for entertaining experiment. . . . When Kitchener arrived in Egypt the tide of economic prosperity had turned and was on the flow again. . . . The tranquillity which ensued may have had its origin in natural prosperity: but to Kitchener's insight belongs the credit of having recognized the opportunity. He has been criticized for extravagant expenditure, but that expenditure was mostly of a productive character, all tending to promote the cheerful confidence and sense of well-being of the people. But to say merely that he had good luck and made good use of it would be to do much less than justice to Kitchener's great qualities."<sup>1</sup>

When on leave in England during the summer of 1914 there came to Kitchener the first rumblings of the coming storm. The tragedy of Sarajevo unchained the tempest. On Friday, 31st July, all British officials on leave in England were ordered back to their duties. From Broome on Monday, 3rd August, Kitchener motored to Dover to catch a special train waiting for

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lloyd, *Egypt under Cromer*, II, p. 174 *et seq.*

him at Boulogne. As he was stepping on the boat a message summoned him to speak by telephone with London. He was asked to return. What his destiny was to be was not revealed. He knew but little, for although a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence, certain it is that his advice as to what the action of the British Empire should be in such a moment of crisis had not been sought during that summer. The army was convinced that the British Expeditionary Force must proceed to France to take up its position on the extreme left of the French line: that much he realized. But, except for generalities, with the actual details of any such plan—and still less with all its implications—he was not familiar, because although in the army he was not of it. To him the Woman had once said, "You are neither Friend nor Servant", so he had remained the Cat that walked alone.

## CHAPTER XII

### SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR

ON the declaration of war both Press and popular clamour were insistent in their demand that Lord Kitchener should fill the office of Secretary of State for War, then vacant. Mr. Asquith, the Premier, who had been doing the work of Secretary of State, was already of that opinion. So on the afternoon of 5th August, and again next day, Kitchener attended the historic Council of War that was held at 10 Downing Street to discuss the British plan of campaign. On the latter day he entered the War Office as its new chief.

Even though he had unquestionably pondered long and deeply over the contingencies that had now come to pass, and had foreseen much of that which was about to happen, in this new office of Secretary of State for War he was facing a task of which he had formed no true conception. For he still knew all too little of the British army except what he had seen of it in his campaigns—and that knowledge was now out of date. Further, he possessed but an imperfect appreciation of the administrative, political and social difficulties that lay across his path at the War Office. Still less did he realize the complicated ways of Cabinet Government at home, nor the obstacles of a bureaucratic administration that relied so largely on precedent for nearly all its actions and attached so much importance to reputations, deserved or otherwise. Had he possessed

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In acquired dexterity in circumventing the obstacles, as well as that knowledge, born of experience, of how to handle a Whitehall department and its numerous staff, all this might have mattered less. On the contrary, to make matters worse, he found a War Office bereft of every personality that mattered, and a General Staff that had been lopped of almost every effective limb. In their stead there had been collected an improvised organization—mostly reservist or “dug-out” officers, many of whom either trembled at his name or shivered because of their own ignorance of how to grapple with the task before them. It is true that among them were many able men who, in the end, more than adequately filled serious gaps. But at the moment they needed time and experience to settle down to their tasks, and this was precisely what could not be granted them.

In such surroundings arrived this masterful individual, gifted with all the attributes and defects of the centralizing mind, shy before strangers and unwilling to trust them unless it were inevitable, sometimes even repelled by anything but immediate comprehension of his wishes, and—worst of all—frequently misunderstood if not actually feared. In return, he enjoyed the countervailing advantages of an overwhelming determination, a high degree of patience and perseverance that seemed able to surmount all obstacles. Nevertheless, after some months, long hours of work and unaccustomed opposition began to hamper even that massive personality in the course of protracted meetings with a Cabinet of twenty-one nimble-tongued civilians who never understood him—any more than he understood them. For he could not claim either the gift of conducting a clever discussion on paper nor the silver-tongued ability to sway his colleagues. Indeed,

Kitchener fully realized his own limitations: in the past he had steadily declined to take up work at the War Office, because of his own incapacity to persuade by honeyed words.<sup>1</sup> Flashes of intuition, deliberate modes of approach: yes, that was another matter. So he fell back on his inner inspirations, his own strength of purpose and his own prestige. For he could rely on popular support as no other leading figure in Britain, while, in addition, he was fortified by the personal and unswerving approval of the Crown to an extent that was scarcely accorded to any other British subject during the first two years of war.

The story is told that on sitting down for the first time at the Secretary of State's desk Kitchener picked up a pen that spluttered. "What a War Office!" he exclaimed. "No army! Not even a pen that can write!" The first contacts with the War Office seemed to confirm the low estimate that he had formed of it in the Sudan, South Africa and in India. All his past experience seemed to demonstrate to him that the methods prevalent in Whitehall were just as dilatory as they were archaic. And here was the proof. So he must set to work, regardless of all accepted procedure, to create what did not exist. It was perhaps not the best road to success, but fundamentally Kitchener was correct, for he realized full well how little thought had ever been devoted in the past concerning the broader policy to be adopted by Great Britain on the outbreak of such a war. The Admiralty, of course, had prepared for a German war at sea, but for little else: the efficiency of the naval mobilization filled him with admiration. But the War Office, as the result of the conversations held with the French General Staff

<sup>1</sup> See p. 112.

had hypnotized itself into the fixed determination to face the British Expeditionary Force on the left of the French armies, wherever that might be, and no alternative had been studied, just as Kitchener had foreseen Japan nearly five years earlier.<sup>1</sup>

From the first day he faced the war in a far broader and long-sighted fashion than any Allied statesman or soldier. The accepted theory of a war lasting three months he dismissed without comment. "On almost the first occasion that he joined us," said Mr. Winston Churchill, "and in soldierly sentences he proclaimed a series of inspiring and prophetic truths. Everyone expected that the war would be short: but wars took unexpected courses, and we must now prepare for a long struggle. Such a conflict could not be ended on the sea or by sea-power alone. It could be ended only by great battles on the Continent. In these the British Empire must bear its part on a scale proportionate to its magnitude and power. We must be prepared to put armies of millions in the field and maintain them for several years. In no other way could we discharge our duty to our allies or to the world."<sup>2</sup> Thus did Kitchener make it clear that he envisaged an army not of seven but of seventy divisions; and further, that the war would last at least three years, and in certain eventualities even longer. Not infrequently it has been alleged that Kitchener thus foretold the lengthy course of the war on no adequate grounds save blunt instinct. Closer study seems to show that a far more logical process of thought had also guided him to this great conclusion. To begin with, in South Africa he had himself conducted a campaign for one year and a half

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 123-4.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, *The Great War* (Ed. Newnes), I, p. 134.

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was no more or less than a war of attrition against a white enemy who would not admit defeat. If that struggle had been "the last of the gentlemen's wars" in the nineteenth century, it was—from more than one point of view—far more plainly the first of the "national wars" of the twentieth century: in fact from the very first the manner of its conduct revealed quite a marked "totalitarian" tendency. Later, on leaving India he visited the battlefields of the Manchurian War of 1904-5 and had been impressed by the huge scale of that war. Next he had gone to Australia to overhaul the defence organization of the Commonwealth. There he transfixed an Australian audience by declaring that "it is the last and not the first million England can put into the field that will give us victory". In 1911 he had taken stock of the Agadir incident; subsequently he attended meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Again, in 1912 he was present at the Imperial Defence Conference at Malta where Mr. Asquith first came to know him. "It is impossible," then wrote Mr. Asquith, "not to be impressed with his striking and formidable personality, while his actual achievements in the East and in South Africa had shown a resourcefulness and versatility which are not always at the command of even the most accomplished soldier."<sup>1</sup> Finally, in 1914 Kitchener had remarked that the completion of the widening of the Kiel Canal might witness a German attack on France. It cannot be held that he had been overtaken by the threat of hostilities in 1914 without some reflection as to what it portended.

Firm in his belief in a long duration of war, he immediately set about creating an army fit to carry such a burden. The regular army was mobilizing to go abroad.

<sup>1</sup> Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, II, p. 81.

leaving behind reserves scarcely adequate to feed its six or seven divisions for a few weeks. So he looked around for new troops. To secure raw recruits to serve in the highly trained regular ranks, to dole out dribbles of men to an army in the field, seemed to him an absurdity. What else was there? The Indian army: well, that could be drawn upon: that was done. But at home? The Territorial Force. Yes: but here Kitchener doubted. French Territorials he remembered from his days with Chanzy's army in 1871. Territorials, forsooth! What were they to him? Pledged to home defence, with officers of the Volunteer stamp whom he might have seen in his days in London during the 'seventies. Territorial Artillery: what did he know of it save that Lord Roberts had inveighed against it in the House of Lords? Lord Roberts, too, had invited him to join in the crusade for national service: that was, in fact, another method of decrying the Territorial force. On the other hand, in Australia he had seen the fine material which had grown up round Australian compulsory training.

Acting on the impulse of what he knew, he issued his celebrated appeal for 100,000 men for a "new" regular army of six divisions. Men he did not require in order to patch the existing forces: he set out literally to create a new army—not officered by Territorials but by regulars and picked men. Soon he had good reasons for renewing his appeal for yet another 100,000; again a third; yet a fourth; and then again a fifth. For what did he hear and perhaps even look upon from the War Office windows? Recruiting officers besieged by thousands of eager men, who demanded enrolment in the famous regiments which they had known and seen. If recommended to join Territorial units, they

would have none of it. No: it must be the regiments that were to fight in France. Serve under Territorial officers in units pledged to home defence? Never! It must be the real thing and no make-believe. Regular officers and Regular comrades. Tales went around of "Class" Territorial battalions unable to cook: of Territorial batteries incapable of coping with unsuitable horses: of Territorial officers asking for leave on the first day of mobilization to wind up their business: of battalions uncertain whether their existing establishment would be fit or willing to undertake the obligation to serve abroad: how many entire divisions, it was often asked, had registered engagements for service abroad before the outbreak of war? True, these were but tales, possibly based on exceptions: but these little clouds of fact were soon magnified until they filled the heavens.

How far Kitchener would have acted more wisely with a view of the future is difficult to determine. If he stood out as the prophet, as the one voice that foretold the long war, trying to rouse his countrymen to make the great effort, he must play his part of national leader: to that extent he must go his own way. To him the Regular and Territorial organizations such as they existed in 1914 might seem but another form of that Dual Control such as he had once stood out against in India. The Territorial County Association scheme may have been admirable in time of peace: he could see no guarantee that it might not easily provoke an unnecessary dispersion of effort in war. If indeed a system of national registration, with a view to compulsory service, had existed, ready to be grafted upon it —well and good: then it might have proved of great value. But such did not exist. The time, he thought, had



THE FAMOUS KITCHENER RECRUITING POSTER, 1914  
(Imperial War Museum: Copyright reserved)



not come for conscription. So, confident in himself, he set about raising his new armies.

True it is that many have since thought that, profiting both from his immense prestige and from the temper of the people at large, he might have seized the opportunity and declared himself in favour of compulsory service. Perhaps: but the difficulties in the way of such a course would have been great. To put forward such a plan might have split the Cabinet. Then what of Labour? Delay in exploiting the enthusiasm produced by his call to the nation might have told heavily against its chances of success. Finally, what might have been the practical outcome of such a policy? One million men to be called up with neither accommodation, arms nor cadres for their reception or training. In such conditions the murmurs of the unwilling would have multiplied the difficulties. The wastefulness, in both men and money, of the measures that were taken in raising the "K" armies is to be deplored. Yet was it not perhaps inevitable? What else could be done? To let the initial enthusiasm of the nation spend itself in waiting, or even to have cramped it between rational bounds, might that not have shattered all its spontaneity? Would it have been better in the end? Who can tell? And so this leads once more only to idle speculation. Let it suffice that Kitchener alone proclaimed a belief in a prolonged war on land: and he resolutely made ready to wage it with all the strength of the nation.

The War Office creaked under the strain of the impulse imparted to it by its new chief. Such methods of work had never been known. Staid messengers, their coat tails streaming behind, raced down the corridors. Long-established decorum of routine went by the board. The response of the call for the new armies was in-

creasing its toil in terrific fashion. Much abuse was hurled at Kitchener's head: he was dubbed "the organizer of disorganization" and kindred terms. But it was steadily overlooked that by his determination alone nine times out of ten he could square the round hole or round the square peg. By such methods progress was achieved, in unconventional, if sometimes wasteful, manner. In his own way he achieved what probably no living statesman or soldier could at that time have accomplished. As an instance of his methods there may be quoted Lord Esher's account of Kitchener's handling of the refusal to admit Red Cross Ambulances to assist the Royal Army Medical Corps in the field. "What would have taken any other Secretary of State ever known or imagined, days of reflection over files of Memoranda, possibly followed by the appointment of committees of investigation, was done in a flash by the ringing of a bell and a word of command. He was on that day the Kitchener of Khartoum, whom his political colleagues never saw, but who for the first year of the War stood between them and disaster."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless arms could not be called from the earth like men to follow the drum. But in spite of every such handicap the new divisions in a tidal wave of enthusiasm set to work to turn out soldiers. With difficulty Kitchener filched an officer and a few men from departing regular regiments to train the new units. Mistakes were made: failures occurred. Still the new armies stood four-square to all the winds that blew. In vain the abuse heaped on their creator grew louder: the tone of such remarks may be judged from Sir Henry Wilson's diaries for September. "K.'s shadow armies, for shadow campaigns, at unknown and distant dates, prevent a lot of

<sup>1</sup> Esher, *Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, p. 61.

ood officers, N.C.O.s and men from coming out. It is scandalous thing. Under no circumstances can these mobs now being raised, without officers and N.C.O.s, without guns, rifles, or uniforms, without rifle-ranges or training grounds, without supply or transport services, without *morale* or tradition, knowledge or experience, under no circumstances could these mobs take the field for two years. Then what is the use of them? What we want, and what we must have is for our little force out here to be kept to full strength with the very best of everything. Nothing else is any good." And again: "His (Lord Kitchener's) ridiculous and preposterous army of 25 corps is the laughing-stock of every soldier in Europe. It took the Germans 40 years of incessant work to make an army of 25 corps with the aid of conscription: it will take us to all eternity to do the same by voluntary effort."<sup>1</sup> Events proved such opinions to be a prejudiced delusion. In spite of ridicule and opposition, Kitchener kept on his way undeterred. The New Armies were hammered into being in the teeth of incredible difficulties.

Yet for all the greatness of his work in creating the new armies it was as a visible inspiration to his countrymen that Kitchener rendered them his greatest service. He enjoyed a prestige among the people such as no other modern soldier had ever acquired, and he turned it to the best account. "The nation was in courage flaming: in resolve at white heat: and, above all, in revolt against false and sentimental advisers. It asked for nothing but inspiration and direction. The swift and universal recognition that Kitchener alone could give both affords the measure alike of his character and his qualities, as this great and just people conceived of

<sup>1</sup> Callwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, I, pp. 162, 178.

ooth."<sup>1</sup> It was not Kitchener's military achievements nor the high offices that he had held which mattered, but his personality, determination and devotion to his country.

It is curious to find that Clausewitz, writing with his long experience of the Napoleonic wars, should in this very matter have stated his definite belief that: "We are far from holding the opinion that a War Minister smothered in official papers, a scientific engineer, or even a soldier who has been well tried on the field, would, any of them, necessarily make the best Minister of State, where the Sovereign does not act for himself: or in other words, we do not mean to say that this acquaintance with the nature of war is the principal qualification for a War Minister: elevation, superiority of mind, strength of character, these are the principal qualifications which he must possess: a knowledge of War may be supplied in one way or the other."

Yes: but it was precisely this lesser technical knowledge so important in modern war that was not readily forthcoming. The General Staff at the War Office, except for specialists, had disappeared. G.H.Q. overseas was too full of its own cares, and could or would not advise. So it was precisely in regard to these technical matters with which Kitchener tried to grapple single-handed that he tended to go astray. Moreover, in many matters he would be disregarded: the great centralizing mind could not attend to detail. He began to learn, it is true: but in like measure as he learnt, so he seemed to lose some of that faculty of rapid, correct if imperious, decision. Sir Charles Callwell, being in

<sup>1</sup> Earl of Birkenhead, *Points of View*. This is a spirited reply to Lord Esher's *Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*.

daily contact with the Secretary of State, noted that his self-confidence in what he termed troop movements and plans to that end showed signs of being impaired. His judgment was no longer so sure, while from the beginning of 1915 onwards he began more to lean on the help and opinion of others than had been his custom. Yet even such weakenings did not betray real decadence, nor did they diminish his greatest work—the conversion of Britain into a military power of the first rank. A greater patriot and a far lesser egoist than yonder ancient Roman, whom in certain ways he recalls, Kitchener, like him, might justly claim:

“Alone I did it.”

(*Coriolanus*, V, 7, 117.)

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE WESTERN FRONT

SO far Kitchener had been dealing with the Nation. There was yet another and totally different side to his work. In assuming the office of Secretary of State he had by force of circumstances, perhaps unconsciously if not unwillingly, taken upon himself the task of Chief of the General Staff, not to mention the virtual office of Commander-in-Chief which had been abolished some ten years earlier. So he came very directly into contact with the army which had only accepted him with doubts: for to the highest military authorities in office he was still the Cat that walked alone, waving his wild tail.

The mobilization of the Regular Army had begun and the elaboration of the plan of campaign brooked little delay. At the original Council of War held on 5th August some diversity of opinion had prevailed as to where the Expeditionary Force should concentrate in France. Kitchener, fearing a great German sweep, passing through Belgium, much farther west than any others present were ready to contemplate, suggested Amiens, for he recognized that in view of previous events a junction with the French left was now inevitable. Finally a decision was postponed until the French plans should be better known. On the 7th Kitchener had an angry scene with Major-General Henry Wilson who "answered back", as he had "no

intention of being bullied by him (Kitchener), especially when he talks such nonsense as he did to-day".<sup>1</sup> Five days later a party of French general staff officers visited the War Office to discuss the strategy of the war. Once more Kitchener held forth in front of a huge map and expounded his reasons for the belief that the French plan of campaign was based on insecure foundations. The Frenchmen admitted the logic of his argument but went away unconvinced. So Kitchener, alone in his desire to see the British concentrate away back from Amiens, was outnumbered in that decision. Further objections were forthcoming from the chiefs of the Expeditionary Force. On that day wrote General Wilson: "At 3 o'clock we six, Sir John [French], Archie [Sir Archibald Murray], self and 3 Frenchmen met in Lord K.'s room in the War Office. There we wrangled for 3 hours. K. wanted to go to Amiens and he was incapable of understanding the delays and difficulties of making such a change, nor the cowardice of it, nor the fact that either in French victory or defeat we would be equally useless. He still thinks the Germans are coming north of the Meuse in great force, and will swamp us before we concentrate. In the end we agreed to a small and perfectly useless alteration, just enough to give trouble and add confusion. Then Kitchener and Sir John went to Asquith, who also agreed, not knowing anything at all about it."<sup>2</sup>

So the British army concentrated near Maubeuge and the stage was set for the Great Retreat. Mons and Le Cateau were fought. Sir John French's optimism gave way to a fit of depression. His despatches received in London on the last two days of August betrayed his intention to retire in rear of the River Seine, and the

<sup>1</sup> Callwell, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Callwell, op. cit., pp. 162-3.

to refit his army independently of the French. Small wars had been a poor school in which to learn of casualties and a retreat in European war. Kitchener, who saw clearly the hidden dangers of such action, sped to Paris in the middle of the night and there encountered Sir John French. Arriving in the uniform of a field-marshall, he presided over a conference at the British Embassy, after which he summoned Sir John to a private interview. What happened has never been revealed. Certain it is that the retirement of the British forces was checked and that Sir John French thence-forward conformed to the French movements. "M. Poincaré's view that the 'misunderstanding was then very serious', and that its removal was due for the most part to Lord Kitchener, although it is not reconcilable with Sir John French's account of these episodes, has never been questioned in France or England by anyone who was aware of what passed during those critical hours, and Lord Kitchener is entitled to a prominent place among those, including Galliéni and Foch, who contributed to the success of Joffre in the battle of the Marne."<sup>1</sup> A few days later, when the Battle of the Marne had been fought, Major Sir F. E. Smith (later Lord Birkenhead) brought Kitchener the communiqué dealing with the results of that encounter. Straightway Kitchener struck out the words describing the result as an "important success": in their place he inserted the expression "decisive victory". In answer to an expostulation Kitchener maintained that his wording was correct.<sup>2</sup>

From the day the Expeditionary Force left the country Kitchener's first care was to feed it with reinforcements.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Esher, *Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Hodges, *Lord Kitchener*, p. 238.

At the instance of the Committee of Imperial Defence two Regular divisions had been left in England to guard against a possible German land attack. Kitchener with his suspicions regarding the solidity of the Territorial Force had endorsed this view. But in August as the necessity grew more urgent overseas he released the 4th Division just in time to participate in the battle of Le Cateau: and again the 6th Division in September in time to arrive on the battlefield of the Aisne. Next by assembling the remaining Regular units that stood to hand he organized a 7th Division. This formation, however, was despatched direct to Belgium. In conjunction with Mr. Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, Kitchener made an attempt to stave off the fall of Antwerp and to save the Belgian army. Although this attempt failed, a few days' respite was gained, while the whole diversion reacted not unfavourably on the course of the campaign. Next he brought back from India and from foreign garrisons all Regular troops except for a very few battalions left in India: to Egypt, in exchange, he sent one, and to India two, whole Territorial divisions. Out of the home-coming Regular troops were formed the 8th, 27th, 28th and 29th Divisions. It was a bold stroke to denude India of Regular troops, and well worthy of Kitchener at his best. Three of the new divisions were despatched to France with all possible speed. Next were sent two divisions of Indian troops. These were followed, up to the end of 1914, by two score of picked Territorial battalions. Kitchener was beginning to think better of the Territorials, although still resolutely setting his face against sending out an entire Territorial Division as an independent formation. It was some months before the 46th (South Midland) Division, to be followed by

the 47th (1st London) Division, crossed the Channel. Even then Kitchener only parted with these troops under the strongest pressure and to save his cherished New Armies for the purpose he had fondly hoped might come to pass: that is, that they should take the field simultaneously. In the end the "new" divisions, too, began to go to France although, once more, it was only dire necessity that extracted them from Kitchener's economizing grasp. Those who decried his methods in doling out these troops should reflect on what happened when United States troops began to appear in France. Truly, Kitchener and Pershing had much in common.

The breach with Army Headquarters in France was growing. Kitchener was accused of withholding the reinforcements that might end the war "by Christmas". But he was obdurate—much as Foch showed himself later in 1918 when harried by Pétain for reinforcements. Mr. Churchill had visited Sir John French at the end of September. "I could not share the optimism of the Staff. . . . I combated their views to the best of my ability, being fully convinced of Kitchener's commanding foresight and wisdom in resisting the temptation to meet the famine of the moment by devouring the seed-corn of the future. . . . I consider that this prudent withholding from the army in the field, in face of every appeal and demand, the key-men who alone could make the new armies, was the greatest of the services which Lord Kitchener rendered to the nation at this time, and it was a service which no one of less authority than he could have performed."<sup>1</sup>

Divergence of opinion with British Headquarters overseas combined with the doubts or ignorance on military

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, *World Crisis*, I, quoted in Sir Henry Wilson's *Diaries*, I, p. 179.

atters of his colleagues did not facilitate matters. The failure to relieve Antwerp in October, as the result of operations carried out so largely at the instigation of Mr. Churchill, had disconcerted Kitchener. The French had not assisted as he had reckoned. The entire attitude of the French Government, and of General Joffre in particular, was becoming more intransigent. Even in early 1915 the British army in France formed but one-tenth of the Allied forces. Loyalty and expediency both left no alternative but to conform to French desires. So the operation culminating in the attack at Neuve Chapelle was brought about. Optimistic opinions, emanating principally from G.H.Q. overseas, at first raised this inconclusive action to the level of a "victory". After more mature reflection the inadequacy of the British resources in men and munitions was recognized as conducive to inevitable lack of success. From that moment Sir John French began to feel aggrieved with the War Office for what he regarded as a culpable shortage of ammunition, particularly as regards H.E. shell. Neuve Chapelle was followed in May by Festubert. Yet nothing was more clearly established than the tardiness of the discovery by Sir John French and his staff of (1) the part which high explosive was destined to play, and (2) the stupendous scale of the ammunition supply required for the new warfare.<sup>1</sup> And Sir John French, having during the previous years been in the position at the War Office where he should have foreseen such needs and provided against them, was the first to vent his displeasure against the War Office, and therefore against Kitchener. So the rift between Kitchener and Sir John French with his *éminence grise*, Sir Henry Wilson, grew, although on

<sup>1</sup> Earl of Birkenhead, *Points of View*, p. 6.

the surface it did not as yet show too clearly. Kitchener's credit in the country still stood far too high to be shaken by any small intrigue.

Kitchener had indeed striven by every means in his power to increase and to accelerate the output of munitions. How could it be otherwise? If he had foreseen the need for 70 in the place of 7 divisions, surely the supply of ammunition for these far greater forces must keep pace with such an increase in man-power? But the hindrances in the way of such an increase had seemed all but insuperable. "The multiplication of factories, the diversion and dilution of labour, the more extensive employment of women, had been pressed upon all the Departments by Lord Kitchener in the spring of 1915 with constant and ever-increasing urgency."<sup>1</sup> It was, therefore, an entirely unjustifiable attack that was set going against him by no other than Sir John French. Acting through his henchman, Colonel Repington, military correspondent of *The Times*, bitter accusations were formulated against Kitchener and the War Office. After the battle of Festubert a telegram was sent to that paper on 14th May, in which it was stated that "the want of an unlimited supply of high explosives was a fatal bar to our success". On 18th May in the House of Lords, Kitchener denounced the accusation and defended the work of the War Office in the matter of munition supply. The next day *The Times*, published a virulent attack on the Secretary of State, questioning his facts and accusing the War Office of supineness and inefficiency. "Men died in heaps," so it was stated, "upon Aubers Ridge ten days ago, because the field guns were short of high explosive shells." Yet on 2nd May—one week before the battle—Sir John French had

<sup>1</sup> Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, II, p. 76.

written to Kitchener, "The ammunition will be all right".<sup>1</sup> Kitchener, indeed, treated the matter with large-minded equanimity. He survived the attack in triumphant fashion.

At the same time political discontent was stimulated by this outcry about the shortage of munitions. Clearly the important Conservative party could no longer be excluded from the Government, since the ordinary methods of party administration would not stand the strain of war-time government. The first Coalition, or National, Government of the War was then formed. Out of the preceding Liberal Administration three ministers retained their offices: Mr. Asquith as Prime Minister; Sir Edward Grey at the Foreign Office; Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State for War. Kitchener in fact had been violently attacked, and a serious intrigue had been started to dispossess him of his office, largely on the strength of the shortage of munitions. But it was realized that his prestige was such that he could not effectively be replaced. He remained in his appointment, fortified by the reception of the Order of the Garter at the hands of the King. And the offending daily paper was publicly burnt at the Stock Exchange. His position was stronger than ever.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, *Kitchener*, III, p. 236; Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, II, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> For further information concerning the munitions shortage, see Appendix III.

## CHAPTER XIV

### POLITICS AND THE NEAR EAST

THE winter of 1914-5 had come and gone, bringing little comfort to those in France and England who had looked forward to a speedy termination of the war. To Kitchener, celebrating his first Christmas in England for forty years, the bitter cold of the winter proved a sore trial. What would he not have given to spend a few months in that Eastern sunshine which had become all but a necessity of life to him. True that his great prestige had shielded him from the more chilling draughts of party politics. At the very start of the War he had been made aware of the dismal lengths to which party feelings might be pursued when in certain quarters Lord Haldane, the former Liberal Secretary of State for War, had been made the target of a virulent attack. Pained by such a manifestation, Kitchener had appealed to Mr. Bonar Law to use his influence to check this unjustifiable outburst. The answer he received, so it would seem, was to the effect that as the War would be of brief duration and party politics would shortly resume their play, there was no need to call the hounds off their quarry, since the attack on Haldane was all a plank in the party programme. Kitchener, however, had not been deterred: the attack ceased. As the spring went on, however, Kitchener himself had also become the target for criticism, that grew in intensity after Neuve Chapelle had been fought and seemed to bring the end no nearer.

Causes for dissatisfaction certainly existed. In early 1915 the Allied situation was by no means favourable. Kitchener, too, was growing more cautious and secretive while finding it more and more difficult to foresee the course of events. The French were reticent as to their schemes: the Russians all but silent. How could any plans for the future be made? Moreover, Kitchener, on his purely military side, had a palpable weakness: he was not an experienced tactician, for campaigning in the Sudan and in South Africa had been somewhat too one-sided. Neither was he an expert in matters of armament, and since the beginning of the War his perpetual absorption in larger questions of organization left him less and less time to delve into problems of trench weapons or of artillery progress. It therefore came about that the beginning of trench warfare left him perplexed. He fully realized that the German lines in Belgium and France were assuming the character of a field fortress, and that the campaign was taking on all the forms of siege warfare. Thus far he could see quite plainly: and this conviction confirmed all his beliefs in a lengthy war.

Yet it was, and still is, all too easy to misjudge Kitchener's work and influence in his capacity as a Minister of the Crown and a member of the Cabinet. To a point the dazzling success that had attended the raising of the New Armies tended to obscure the true situation in which he was placed. In the domain of the expansion of the army he had, subject to the Premier's approval, been master in his own house. But when it came to more complex matters of war policy this was no longer the case. Even before proceeding to Paris in September, 1914, to check the further retreat of the Expeditionary Force, he had felt compelled to consult

his Cabinet colleagues. Lord Esher had recognized his position clearly when he wrote to him:<sup>1</sup> "You have been handicapped and at times foiled by having to adapt your comparatively small military forces to the requirements of France on the one hand and the demands of your colleagues on the other. . . . The supreme direction of the War has never been in your hands."

Cramped as he was by force of circumstances, he could find less and less room for his accustomed methods of work. He began to feel more and more, as he put it to Mr. Churchill, that "We cannot make war as we ought: we can only make it as we can".<sup>2</sup> Consequently, except in the matter of preparing the New Armies, there was less scope for the massive and far-reaching decisions, driven home to a logical end, that had been Kitchener's forte in the past. Strange that he should have been forced unknowingly into accepting Moltke's dogma that "strategy is but a system of expedients".

As no issue appeared probable in Flanders, so political opinions, following the fertile brain of Mr. Churchill, had veered round to an attempt to be made in the East; on the other hand, British Headquarters in France and all the French authorities were becoming more vocal in their clamour for reinforcements in the west. But all Kitchener's acquired interests and sympathies led him to think of the East. As early as 2nd January the Russians, finding themselves in difficulties to hold off the Turkish attacks in the Caucasus, had appealed to London for a "demonstration" calculated to draw off their enemy from the Caucasian front. Kitchener toyed with the idea, unquestionably fascinated by the term

<sup>1</sup> On 23rd January, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, *The Great War* (Ed. Newnes), p. 485.

"demonstration". But not having any troops to spare, he turned a deaf ear and referred the Russians to the Admiralty. After long discussions a War Council, held on 28th January, decided upon a naval attack against the Dardanelles. But in the meantime Mr. Lloyd George had pressed for a diversion to assist Serbia. Greece having been understood to promise armed support for such an expedition, the bulk of the armed forces would have been found from that Greek source. Kitchener agreed to send the 29th Division, his last pre-War division of Regular troops, with possibly one Territorial division to participate in the venture. Then of a sudden on 15th February, Greece refused to consider the project further.

On the next day a War Council met and it was definitely decided that as the Serbian project had petered out the 29th Division, with other troops from Egypt, should be held ready for operations at the Dardanelles to support the fleet. The naval bombardment began on 19th February, this being the second occasion on which the ships had carried out such an attack. Already on 3rd November when Turkey entered the War an Allied bombardment of the Straits had been attempted. How far this naval action, premature as it was, moved Kitchener is hard to say. But he certainly withdrew his consent to the employment of the 29th Division. Without doubt considerable pressure had been put on him from France, where every soldier British and French, was urging him to send reinforcements to that theatre, mainly on the assumption that Russia was in a sinking condition. Kitchener now seemed set against the Dardanelles expedition. He stood alone. Even Mr. Asquith pressed him to release the 29th Division.

By March the situation had somewhat improved. The effects of the naval attack of 19th February had been perceptible throughout the Balkans. General Birdwood's telegrams from the East were more reassuring; so Kitchener finally let go the 29th Division. Finally, on 1st March a second offer of military assistance arrived from Greece. Four or five divisions were to be landed in conjunction with the Allies on Gallipoli Peninsula. Most unfortunately, the Russians, having set their hearts on the acquisition of Constantinople, flatly refused that Greece should participate in any combined attack on Turkey. So the whole scheme was again in the melting-pot.

The third naval attack against the Straits began on 18th March and ended in naval losses, mostly due to mines. How far the naval refusal to repeat the attempt then and there was justifiable must remain a matter for speculation. There is, at least, ample evidence to show that the Turkish defences were approaching the end of their resources both in heavy gun ammunition and in mines. But the professional chiefs of the Admiralty declined, and so Mr. Churchill was left to make this confession to the Cabinet. There, as he put it, "Lord Kitchener was always splendid when things went wrong. Confident, commanding, magnanimous, he made no reproaches. In a few brief sentences he assumed the burden and declared he would carry the operations through military force. So here again there was no discussion; the agreement of the Admiral and the General on the spot, and the declaration of Lord Kitchener, carried all before them. . . . Three months before how safe, how sound, how sure would this decision have been. But now!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, *The Great War*, p. 627.

That Kitchener had at the very outset been opposed to the Gallipoli adventure is the belief of those who had direct dealings with him at the moment. On the other side stood Mr. Churchill, in whose judgment Kitchener unquestionably believed. There was the call of the East. He himself had been a witness of the bombardment of Alexandria. Wondrous tales were told him of the great guns of H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* which, gunnery experts maintained, would outdo the German artillery that had demolished the forts of Liége and Namur. Then, too, he was taking a far broader view of the war than his colleagues. He dreaded the dangers threatening Russia, and he could not fail to be fascinated by the prize that promised to reward the forcing of the Straits. Lastly there was British prestige in the Moslem world. Here, indeed, was a case where Kitchener might have displayed all the decision and prescience of old. But he was now making war, not as he ought but as best he could. Compromise was the essence of Cabinet Government: so he compromised. Loyalty to Mr Churchill lured him to gamble: so he gambled.

Then began the difficulties: the collection of troops and ships, the embarkation, the supply of the necessary army. To make matters worse, no general staff to foresee, to plan, to supervise. How could Kitchener single-handed possibly cope with such a task? And that when he had the war in Flanders, not to mention the organization of his New Armies, to manage? It was not until 25th April that the great landing on Gallipoli was effected; nearly six months of the war with Turkey had then gone by. Three naval attacks had taken place to give warning of the blow about to fall. Success was then scarcely to be expected. At a stormy meeting of the War Council on 14th May, Kitchener showed

his disappointment at the inaction of the fleet, and in particular at the removal of H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*, whose 15-inch guns, it had been so confidently hoped, might play a decisive rôle in the great venture. Then he braced himself for the effort. Three days later he declared himself ready to continue the Gallipoli venture with reinforcements. British prestige in the East depended on it: he set his teeth and determined to press on. And so the process was continued. Kitchener was now in the toils, for events had so worked out that he had to supply two wars on widely different fronts, while the further supply of munitions—through no fault of his own—was causing grave embarrassment on every hand.

There came a brighter interlude. On 6th July an Inter-Allied Conference of statesmen and soldiers met at Calais. It was here that Kitchener scored a real personal triumph. Confident in his case and in his fluency in the French tongue, he dominated the assembly.

Showing a clear grasp alike of the military situation and of the French temperament, he urged a complete cessation of all offensive effort until 1916. The French were much impressed. His own colleagues had never seen him to such advantage. "It was for Lord K. a meteoric moment."<sup>1</sup> But the outlook soon darkened again when the French thought over the situation, and then began to prepare another offensive on a large scale. The situation seemed to be changing. The plight of Russia demanded some drastic measures in the West. Kitchener unwillingly bowed to necessity and in the end committed the British army to the "unwanted" battle of Loos. The wide view that he took of the War, and the needs of Russia ever present to his mind, seemed to justify the sacrifice.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Esher, *Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, p. 140.

But long before Loos was fought, the renewed effort at Suvla Bay had come to grief. It could only be tantalizing to stand so near to victory and yet to fail: and the moment could not have been more inopportune. Kitchener was once more on the horns of the dilemma—East or West. Worse still: it would have been difficult to say that British resources were adequate for a single one of those two operations. And there were still some lesser campaigns overseas! As the autumn wore on and Loos had ended in very little better than failure, the struggle on Gallipoli grew yet more pressing. With the possible arrival of German technicians and material on the peninsula, the problem of evacuation grew insistent.

Simultaneously another complication arose. Ever since early 1915 M. Briand in Paris, Mr. Lloyd George in London, had been advocating the undertaking of an expedition to assist Serbia. Foreign politics had played a considerable part in the whole project. The Allies reckoned on Greece throwing in her lot against the Central Powers and overawing Bulgaria. There was Rumania to win over to the Allied cause. Next in Paris it was decided that some employment had to be found for the Socialist General Sarrail, recently disgraced by Joffre. There is no need to follow the development of this new plan of campaign. At the end of October Joffre, disappointed by the outcome of his Champagne offensive and of Loos, suddenly recommended and virtually forced the Salonika plan upon the British Cabinet. When the decision was first taken to support the expedition, Kitchener strongly opposed it. But General Sarrail had then already landed with the leading French troops. Joffre renewed his protestations as to the urgency of the operation. Gradually

Kitchener saw no alternative but to yield. The entanglement at Salonika could not in any way be attributed to him. Even his most pronounced Oriental leanings never drew him to that spot. It is true that both British and French naval staffs were of the opinion that the enemy should not be allowed free use of the great harbour of Salonika. The question of bringing Greece and Rumania into the Allied fold was mixed with the desire to save Serbia. In spite of all arguments, Kitchener probably never once inclined to shutting up thus irrevocably large allied forces: in spite of that, in the end a large Allied field army was locked away to no useful purpose in the Egean.

In the Cabinet Kitchener's credit had suffered some rude shocks. The unsatisfactory result of the Antwerp affair in the early days had been followed by the more serious flounderings at Neuve Chapelle, Festubert and Givenchy. Next came the Gallipoli expedition. If not directly responsible for its inception, Kitchener had, at least, not checked the growing commitments. It was on record that he had sent British troops into the unsatisfactory battle of Loos. There was the Salonika entanglement that coincided in time with the final crash of all hopes at the Dardanelles. Slowly in the eyes of his colleagues his position had been undermined. They did not realize how the whirlpool had slowly sucked him down into the Dardanelles abyss. Neither could they tell how his sanction of the Loos operations had been extracted out of him by his loyalty towards the French. Finally, they never appreciated the pressure that was placed upon the British Government by their Allies in the matter of Salonika. It had been a thankless year. Fortunately Kitchener's prestige in the nation at large, if slightly dimmed, still held good.

Such was the outcome of making war "not as we ought but as we can". Compromise and debate in place of firm policy and rapid decision had led from one entanglement to another. Yet it must be admitted that Paris and General Joffre were being swayed by politics, if anything, even more than the British Cabinet. Kitchener had indeed been caught in the toils. His personal qualities, his military judgment, even his integrity, were being called into question. Fortunate it was for him that Mr. Asquith, Mr. Churchill and Sir E. Smith should believe and trust him unswervingly as they did.

Lord Esher recognized Kitchener's position clearly. "It is amazing to me," he wrote, "that his colleagues fail to see his bigness, and misconstrue the forceful instinct of the travelled soldier, experienced in men and lands, human passions and volcanic forces, of which they know nothing beyond what educated men know who read books and newspapers. I am convinced that not one of the men who meet him in the supposed intimacy of Cabinet discussion understand him better than they would understand an Arab sheikh or a Hebrew prophet. And Lord K. has about him the attributes of both. It is not unnatural that he should be pathetically obscure to men, even the ablest, whose horizon is bounded by Oxford Street and Whitehall."<sup>1</sup> It was a grievous state of affairs. "I am sick of this world of intrigue," Kitchener declared to Mr. Asquith.

The autumn crisis found the Cabinet still undecided as to the fate of the Gallipoli expedition. It was consequently settled that Kitchener himself should proceed to the Dardanelles to judge of the wisest course to adopt. In his absence Mr. Asquith would direct the War

<sup>1</sup> Esher, *Journals*, III, p. 276-7.

Office. In certain circles the hope was freely expressed that Kitchener should never return. It was imagined that, in his absence, matters might be so arranged that he might be jockeyed into one of three offices: either the Chief Command of the Armies in France, or a similar office in the Levant so as to control operations in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, or the Vice-royalty of India. But Kitchener scented the trap and carried the seals of office away with him in his pocket.

On arriving at Gallipoli Kitchener set to work to inspect the situation of the troops by personal visits. Here he came into his own. Although arriving unheralded he was quickly recognized by the Australian troops, who cheered him in rousing fashion wherever he went. Striding up to the summits of the hills with an almost youthful step, he visited the front-line trenches everywhere. Within sniping distance of the Turks the cheers continued even at those points where such sounds could not fail to draw the enemy's fire.<sup>1</sup> Pleasant it is to read of how "the joy of battle" shone in his eyes: for Kitchener was a true soldier.

Then having sadly decided evacuation to be inevitable he set out for home, visiting on the way King Constantine of Greece to whom he spoke in no mild fashion, and also paying a visit to the King of Italy on the Isonzo Front. Then he made for Paris on the return journey.

<sup>1</sup> *The Australian Official History of the War*, Vol. II, p. 791.



LORD KITCHENER AT GALLIPOLI AMONG THE "ANZACS"





## CHAPTER XV

### H.M.S. HAMPSHIRE

FROM Gallipoli Kitchener returned much refreshed by the sunshine of the Levant, although deeply depressed by what he had come to recognize as the inevitable end of the Dardanelles expedition. On his way home through Paris he became aware of the recall of Sir John French and his replacement by Sir Douglas Haig as Commander-in-Chief. In this matter Kitchener had for some time past harboured doubts as to Sir John's fitness to continue in command of the British army, and doubtless felt thankful that the change had been made in his absence, thereby relieving him of the invidious task of dismissing an old comrade. Another great change that was about to take place, namely the advent of Sir William Robertson to be Chief of the Imperial General Staff, was quite another matter. His selection had been supported by Kitchener himself for some time before setting out for Gallipoli. But Sir William before assuming this office had insisted on certain changes being made by which he desired to modify the position of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. These changes would give him a status far superior to that which he had hitherto enjoyed. Kitchener, although sympathetic with the object in view, did not altogether agree with Robertson as to the system the latter had propounded. A memorable meeting occurred in Paris. Lord Esher paints the picture of the two strong

men, neither ready to yield to the other: in one room, Kitchener motionless at a table before a blank sheet of paper: next door, Robertson in his shirt sleeves, sucking at his pipe. Be that as it may, an agreement was made, and both men showed their bigness of mind by coming to a perfectly honourable and friendly settlement, which in the end worked well. Both gave way on certain points. All orders affecting the actual operations of troops were to be issued over the signature of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who would also have direct access to the new War Council. Kitchener, on the other hand, retained full Parliamentary responsibility for the army and all that concerned it. In this arrangement Mr. Asquith had sided strongly with Robertson.<sup>1</sup>

Although Kitchener may at first have betrayed some reluctance in accepting the new arrangement, he had been the first to acknowledge that the war was placing an incalculable burden on himself. It was not so much the case of his being on the decline, as some have urged: it was rather the fact that the War was daily creating work in proportions that had never been foreseen, so that the new division of responsibility did not, in fact, afford any proof of Kitchener's incapacity to cope with the duties of Secretary of State: neither did it mark a serious fall from favour. Nothing could be further from the truth. When Kitchener had been appointed Secretary of State in August, 1914, he was assuming a burden which, most probably, no civilian minister was either able or in a position to take up. It appears most unlikely that any other soldier could at that moment have played the part with anything approaching success. It is at least certain that no other living

<sup>1</sup> See *Memories and Reflections*, II, p. 82.

ublic personage would have taken such a long view  
s to the duration of the War or possessed the courage  
o act according to his convictions, as Kitchener did  
in the face of all professional opinion to the contrary.  
Let it be remembered, also, that no adequate provision  
had really been made for the conduct of a European  
war by Cabinet Government. There existed no Chief of  
the Imperial General Staff possessed of sufficient author-  
ity or proper access to the Government. Kitchener him-  
self had filled the gaps. At the same time he virtually  
assumed those functions of Commander-in-Chief that  
had been gradually abolished as the result of the Har-  
ington Commission's Report of 1890. Such a position  
was in fact inevitable, for the rule of the army by Army  
Council administration proved unworkable in war.<sup>1</sup> Yet  
he never abused these powers. Only on one occasion  
had he taken advantage of them, namely when he  
proceeded to Paris in September, 1914, to prevent the  
withdrawal of the British army behind the River Seine.  
In no other case does he appear to have intervened or  
checked the independent action of a commander in the  
field. Might he not well recall his own feelings in such  
a matter when he was commanding in the Sudan?

The situation created by Sir William Robertson's  
arrival was, in fact, to some extent contrary to all con-  
stitutional usage. Eventually Sir William's position  
more nearly approximated to that of the normal con-  
tinental conception of a Chief of General Staff. That  
Sir William remained a member of the Army Council,  
and in this capacity still under the order of Kitchener  
as Secretary of State, does not alter what was really an  
anomaly. The conjunction of Kitchener and Robertson

<sup>1</sup> After Lord Kitchener's death Mr. Lloyd George attempted to play  
the same part and ended by antagonizing nearly all the military chiefs.

working in harmony, as they came to do, does not alter the fact that the arrangement was a compromise. It worked smoothly, mainly because these two great soldiers rendered it practicable.

Three times now had Kitchener seen his authority and competence curtailed. First in May, 1915, there had been created the Ministry of Munitions by which the War Office lost the charge of supplying the armies with munitions. Next, in October, 1915, there came into being the scheme of the Earl of Derby for Voluntary National Service, under the direction of that statesman. Lastly, at the end of the year arrived Sir William Robertson with his new conception of the position and work of General Staff. It was perhaps comprehensible that he should have regretted these successive encroachments on his powers. But he felt himself that there was no alternative, since the events of 1915 had revealed the truth that one man could no longer cope with the colossal business of managing the Great War. He was literally, as Mr. Churchill describes him, "the overburdened Titan". If Kitchener was to remain a Minister of the Crown he must delegate some of his cares. For this reason, as Mr. Asquith admitted, Kitchener himself had ever welcomed fresh blood at the War Office, men with first-hand experience of the conduct of war in the field. It was utterly untrue to pretend that Kitchener "neither asked nor took the advice of any man".<sup>1</sup> What does Sir William Robertson say to this? "As to (Kitchener's) alleged habit of over-centralization it was never displayed during the six months that I had the privilege of working with him, and he was as ready to listen to the advice of his departmental heads as were any of the other seven Secretaries of State under whom I have

<sup>1</sup> Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, II, p. 81.

worked. . . . He was a kind and delightful chief to serve, once his ways were understood."<sup>1</sup>

The serious factor in Kitchener's position in the Cabinet was his total lack of support and absence of friends. With the notable exception of Mr. Asquith, with whom Kitchener came to be on a footing almost of intimacy, he had scarcely a single supporter, although after the departure of Mr. Churchill he contracted a warm friendship with Sir F. E. Smith (later the Earl of Birkenhead), of whom he once wrote so pathetically, "F. E. was a real comfort in Cabinet to-day". In the latter half of 1915 he could only feel himself surrounded by men who desired nothing better than his downfall. Yet such was his prestige among the public at large that not one dared to lay as much as a finger upon him.

After Kitchener's return to the War Office the main problem facing him had been that of man-power and conscription. At the outbreak of war he had been averse to the imposition of compulsory service on the nation. But this attitude obviously could not last, for he had never intended to maintain any opposition to the adoption of compulsion should this become necessary. His position was that he could and would raise the army to a total of 70 divisions by voluntary enlistment; but that as soon as the voluntary stimulus should show signs of becoming a spent force compulsion must be enforced. As he himself put it later: "The question of a social change involving the whole country and running counter to the ancient tradition of the British people is not a matter for a department to decide. So long as sufficient men came in, it was not my duty to ask for a special means of obtaining them. In my opinion compulsion came at the right time and

<sup>1</sup> Robertson, *Private to Field-Marshal*, pp. 287-8.

the right way as a military necessity, and for no other reason." He had good grounds for such an attitude. In 1914 no system of registration of manpower had ever been elaborated. Neither did Kitchener altogether trust the Labour Party in regard to his difficult matter; he feared an anti-conscription campaign, which at the lowest estimate might introduce undesirable recruits into his New Armies. Often it has been urged that the popular esteem in which Kitchener was held would have enabled him to carry the whole country and the Parliamentary Labour Party with him on the conscription issue at the beginning of the War. But however much Labour may have trusted Kitchener personally, that feeling might not have extended to any measure of compulsory service that might have been put forward in the programme of any political party; at least so Kitchener imagined.

In July, 1915, the National Registration Act was passed, and this was followed in January, 1916, by a Military Service Act, and so conscription came to be enforced. But by the time of the opening of the battle of the Somme the new British armies had been raised solely by voluntary enlistment. Close on 3,000,000 men had thus joined the colours.

Other pressing matters also claimed Kitchener's personal attention: foremost among these was the problem of a better co-ordination of the Allied military efforts. In this matter he found a ready sympathizer in the new French Minister for War, General Galliéni, who had taken office in M. Briand's administration on 3rd November. Galliéni had made a military reputation of no mean order in Indo-China and Madagascar; he had been Joffre's superior in the latter colony; he understood the Moslem world. He had been, at least,

one of the main sources of inspiration of the battle of the Marne. He was a poor speaker, but known to be a man of decided opinions; in short, a man of experiences and abilities not unlike those of Kitchener. Meetings between the two ministers took place in Paris on Kitchener's journey to Gallipoli on 5th and 6th November. Both Galliéni and Kitchener were in accord as to the imperative necessity for a complete co-ordination of the Allied plans of campaign. Kitchener, on his part, was strongly averse to any unified political control of the operations, such as later came into existence in the shape of the Supreme War Council and the Executive Board. On the other hand, both Galliéni and Kitchener were insistent on the necessity for the complete co-operation of the two Allied General Staffs. Both dreaded the effect of the evacuation of Gallipoli on the Oriental mind, while both wished to put an end to the Salonika venture. In Kitchener's absence in the East, Galliéni proposed that this much to be desired "Unité de Direction" should be secured by means of a War Council formed out of the two General Staffs with a permanent joint secretariat. Joffre at once expressed the opinion that he himself and Sir John French must be members of such a council. In the end Galliéni's fatal illness during the following March, followed by Kitchener's disappearance not so many weeks later, may be said to have put back the adoption of some sort of a system of Unity of Command by two whole years.

If Kitchener's popularity in Britain remained immense, still more remarkable was the vitality of his reputation in France; there seemed no living Englishman who commanded such respect in the French nation at large. In fact, it is no exaggeration to state that in

1916 "there was no military personality in any of the Allied countries of sufficient reputation and character whose name could be put forward with any hope of approval by all as head of a united command of the forces of the Entente. It is believed that Lord Kitchener himself had anticipated a call to this post."<sup>1</sup> Who, indeed, could doubt that, properly supported by a competent staff and specialists, Kitchener might not have successfully filled such a rôle? The breadth of his views and his remarkable judgment on the wider aspects of war would have outweighed by far all his defects in the domain of tactics and lack of experience in what might be termed the technique of battle. Enough, however, for this is but leading to idle speculation.

Still more surprising than Kitchener's popularity in France is the extent to which his name was known, and respected, in Russia. Visitors to that country during the War returned convinced of the reality of his prestige throughout the Russian army. From the start of the War he had paid considerable attention to Russian affairs; and it was no empty compliment that in May, 1916, he should receive an invitation from the Tsar to visit his country and to suggest some reorganization of the methods then in vogue for arming and supplying the Russian forces in the field. So great was the respect for Kitchener and so anxious was the Tsar for his counsel that it may be regarded as possible that the Russians might have accepted the control of a British Mission and assistance for those purposes, had Kitchener lived. In response to the Tsar's invitation it was decided that Kitchener, at the head of a small mission, should proceed to Russia at the opening of June.

<sup>1</sup> *British Official History of the War*, 1916, I, p. 14.

Before setting out he decided to answer his enemies and critics in Parliament by giving them an account of his conduct of affairs as Secretary of State since the opening of the War. At a memorable meeting in a committee room of the Commons on 2nd June, at his own suggestion, he met all members of Parliament who might wish to question him, or be enlightened as to his stewardship. The meeting, which was crowded and prolonged, ended by being an entire success, and those who had come to criticize, to scoff, or even to rebuke, were the first to support a resolution, unanimously carried, conveying to Kitchener the gratitude and admiration of the House.

"On the evening of the same day," writes Mr. Asquith, "he came to see me to say good-bye. He was in the highest spirits and described with gusto and humour some of his friendly passages of arms with his hecklers at the House. He left the room gay, alert, elastic, sanguine."<sup>1</sup> That was the end.

On 5th June, Kitchener left Thurso in a destroyer, H.M.S. *Oak*, and proceeded on board H.M.S. *Iron Duke*, Admiral Jellicoe's flagship in Scapa Flow. At 4.15 p.m. he left the Admiral to board H.M.S. *Hampshire*, that was in waiting to convey him to Archangel. The ship set out without delay. Owing to the north-easterly gale then blowing, the course selected for her lay to the west of the Orkneys and Shetlands. In order to make these waters she unfortunately steamed through an unswept channel. Hardly had she reached it than she struck a mine laid there by a German submarine a few days earlier. Hopelessly damaged, she began to sink rapidly. Efforts were made to launch the boats, but these were instantly smashed against the ship's sides by the raging

<sup>1</sup> Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, II, p. 84.

sea. Kitchener was last seen calm and collected standing with a group of officers. Less than a score of survivors were picked up off rafts that had escaped from the scene of catastrophe. A few bodies, including that of the faithful FitzGerald, were recovered on the Orkney beaches. But of Kitchener himself no trace was ever found. Two years earlier, on taking part in the obsequies of Lord Roberts, he had expressed a hope that he might be spared a military funeral. In this wise was his wish granted.

Some years after H.M.S. *Hampshire* had vanished, a statue was erected to him on the Horse Guards Parade. So typical of the man's career. Standing aside, alone, head averted from Whitehall, eyes gazing toward the open spaces. No conventional military figure; not a trace of ceremonial uniform: in the army yet not of it. The effigy recalls another monument, not half a mile distant: another Royal Engineer: another who went his own way, unafraid: Charles Gordon, for whose relief Kitchener at the outset of his career had striven so hard. Each in his own fashion so unlike all the rest: between the pair a link far greater than that of corps: in that each in his own way had achieved greatness.

## CHAPTER XVI

### K. OF K.

NOTHING is more remarkable in Kitchener's career than the contrast between the prestige to which he rapidly attained among the British public after the Omdurman campaign, and the frigid mistrust that was so often manifested towards him in high places, both military and political, particularly during the Great War. Yet these uncharitable feelings would appear to have been all but exceptionally undeserved.

To the curious, aloof, unworldly strain in his character much of the misunderstanding that followed him through life may be ascribed. Among his contemporaries and colleagues he was never really popular in the usual sense of that term. Up to a point many men knew him quite well, but there acquaintance stopped. Yet if Kitchener had but the fewest of intimate friends, he had many enemies, some envious, some afraid. Traitors and slanderers he might have numbered by the thousand. Tales were even set about—as of Gordon—that he was an addict to alcohol. And of these malign tongues a few reserved their rancour for a very long time. Thus a colleague of the Egyptian cavalry regiment of 1884 could harbour such feelings for no less than thirty years: in 1915 he “determined that it was his duty” to unmask the fraud, to give a hint to the Government: so “I wrote in confidence to an old friend of mine, then an influential member of the Cabinet, telling him that they had not a god to deal

with but a *very ordinary mortal*, as I thought that the position the Press had created for him constituted a positive danger to the country". The writer's correspondent was of a similar kidney, for he answered "You are quite right, we have found that out".<sup>1</sup>

Yet in the end how many of those who approached him, either under the spell of what rumour had said, or labouring under first impressions, could come to revise preconceived ideas of the real K. of K.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Winston Churchill relates how, on meeting him in 1914, he was surprised to find him "more affable than I had been led to expect from my early impressions or from all I had heard about him."<sup>3</sup> In their memoirs Generals Smith-Dorrien, Callwell and Macready each and all expressed some form of recantation of previous ill-formed beliefs as to Kitchener's lack of humanity and friendly feelings. What could be more positive than Sir William Robertson's regret on hearing the news of Kitchener's death? "I am more than sad to lose him. I feel remorseful of my brutal 'bargain'. It was never necessary, and was made only because I was misinformed of the man's nature. He was a fine character, lovable and straight—really."<sup>4</sup> Even the writer quoting this sentiment, Lord Esher, himself a severe critic of Kitchener, went back on his first unfavourable opinion and allows him to have been invariably "courteous, patient, and ready to hear the other side of any question reasonably argued; while from those he liked—I am not sure that he trusted anyone—he would take chal-

<sup>1</sup> Sales la Terrière, *Days that are Gone*, p. 182 (author's italics).

<sup>2</sup> In his earlier days in the Sudan he was known as "K.". The symbol was lengthened to "K. of K.". Finally, as Secretary of State he was usually spoken of as "Lord K.".

<sup>3</sup> *The Great War* (Ed. Newnes), p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> Esher, *Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, p. 185.

nd home truths with astonishing good humour".<sup>1</sup>  
Perhaps Lord Esher was one of those who fell more  
specially into the reservation made in the last sentence:  
may not such an estimation have blurred his outlook  
and his writings?

To his own personal staff, who adored him, K. of K.  
would show another side of his character. A boy in  
and he remained when still over thirty and forty years  
of age; to the end of his career he might still unbend  
and evince a playful simplicity that would surprise  
many who had only seen the stern taskmaster, who  
judged men's capacity for work as he would his own.  
In the very midst of the South African War, after  
longer he had been known to take a prominent part  
in some hilarious game on a billiard table. At Simla  
rumours were heard that the Commander-in-Chief had  
been seen romping on the floor at a children's party  
given at his own house. Some are still living who once  
heard him joining loudly in a full-throated chorus of  
that old song, "There is a tavern in the town". But to the  
majority, who did not see the boyish side, he could show  
a reserve, often amounting to gaucherie, which had no  
more life in it than a theatrical drop scene concealing  
the throb of human drama. Time and again he might  
give umbrage by a seeming aloofness to those of humbler  
station in cases where other men, by an assumed  
geniality or bonhomie, might have earned a reputation  
for charm and tact—undeserved though it might be.  
To the regimental officer the Field-Marshal was nearly  
always an Olympian majesty, unapproachable and in-  
comprehensible. By Kitchener the British subaltern  
was never really understood. Great entertainments  
he would frequently give, for he grew not averse to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

avish hospitality. Yet he never really cared to visit a regimental mess nor to accept the formal inspection dinner. He went as suddenly and unobtrusively as he came. Like the Cat to the end, throughout life he continued to walk alone. Even in India, in his later days, when he had softened and grown more inclined to enjoy the good things of life, he could drive a well-known cricketer to fury by remarks concerning his game. "He expects us to play cricket twice a week, just as if he were prescribing some beastly patent medicine!" was the comment of the horrified sportsman. But moments there were when he was indeed unapproachable by all but his very nearest staff officers. Should things go astray unexpectedly; should there have been some gross oversight on the part of some executant of his schemes, which had consequently missed fire, then indeed Kitchener might withdraw into a moody silence that was hard to break. But still, these occasions were very rare. At times such a phase of moody reserve might be tinged with a form of resentment that could evoke an offer of resignation. Indeed from 1885 when he resigned his Egyptian commission such offers became not infrequent. Lord Cromer treated them seriously, realizing full well that Kitchener's intentions were not to be disregarded, whilst he would be all but impossible to replace. Lord Curzon came to look upon Kitchener's threats to resign with less anxiety as those threats became more frequent. But normally Kitchener would regard his offers of resignation as a potent instrument to obtain his ends. He did not offer to resign during the South African War nor during the Great War; for during either campaign such an action would not have furthered his own purpose, whilst it might benefit his enemies. There was generally reason

behind his attitude, even in his weakest moments. One foible Kitchener certainly did possess: this was belief in his own talent for diplomacy. As Secretary of State he certainly never displayed such gifts in Cabinet meetings, although it is significant that French statesmen and soldiers should have held his ability in far higher esteem than that of any of his civilian colleagues. Yet his record at Fashoda, his negotiations with the Boers, and manner in which he successfully played off a Secretary of State and Prime Minister against such an able career as Lord Curzon, the part that he took inunning over the Amir Habibullah, lend substance to e view that he could manage both men and their fairs. So his dream to act as British ambassador at onstantinople may not have been as wild as many light imagine.

Often it has been thought that Kitchener's gifts as a soldier lay chiefly in the domain of organization. The latter has already been touched upon at various moments in the preceding pages. Kitchener's gifts were less those of organization based on hard and fast principles than on an amazing gift of extemporization and of obtaining the maximum result from available resources. Aided by his astonishing memory and great facility for grappling with an emergency, he would obtain great results in the face of seemingly unfavourable conditions. And that, as far as can be seen, was his forte as a leader in the field. At Paardeberg he displayed a remarkable insight into a difficult military situation. Still, a great tactician he was not. The story is told that when one of his brigadiers asked for instructions on the day of battle, Kitchener remarked that he himself had brought the troops to face the enemy and had supplied them, it was now the place for others to

defeat the enemy. It is of course true that the day for a Napoleonic control of battle is past. If so, then perhaps the broad outlook, the often uncanny foresight, and the quick perception that Kitchener might at any moment exhibit could have gone far to have made him a great leader in modern war. Yet here again it is all speculation.

But those who saw him on his campaigns in the Sudan and in South Africa should best be able to judge of him. Sir Henry Rawlinson, his staff officer in the Nile campaign, who then knew him intimately, thought that "his is a curious and very strong character. I both like and admire him, but on some minor points he is as obstinate as a commissariat mule. He is a long-headed, clear-minded man of business with a wonderful memory. His apparent hardness of nature is a good deal put on, and is, I think, due to a sort of shyness. It made him unpopular at first but, since those under him in the Egyptian army have come to realize what a thoroughly capable man he is, there is a great deal less growling than there used to be."

Again: "To talk of him as being unapproachable is rubbish. He was a much kinder man than he ever dared admit, even to himself, though he sometimes let his tongue run away with him in conversation. He always seemed to me to see just half as far again into the future as anyone else, and the qualities that I most admired in him were his determination and his imagination. His nerve was amazingly good, though he had his intervals of depression in times of strain. I remember before the battle of the Atbara whilst talking of the preparations alone with me, to my intense surprise he burst into tears and sobbed out 'I hope everything will go right. . .' It was much the same

on the eve of the evacuation of Gallipoli. It was not the breakdown of his plans that affected him, but the thought of the losses which an enterprise, apparently so desperate, might entail.”<sup>1</sup>

Sir Henry Rawlinson was quite correct in his observations. Kitchener was never so fierce as his appearance demeanour might suggest. Even in the early days of Sirdarieh he often seemed to wish to exploit the reputation of stern aloofness which he had acquired in order to impress others. It was but a mask that was assumed as a matter of policy to impress the inefficient or such men as he did not like or trust. At such times, in fact, he could even worry and tease; he would literally become the Cat that might play with a mouse. Or else he could assume an attitude of inability to understand that would utterly baffle an inopportune visitor. For the mask was readily discarded or assumed.

On returning from the Cape Lord Roberts had been loud in his praises—“Kitchener’s self-possession, his eagerness to undertake all the hardest and most difficult work, his scorn of notoriety, and his loyalty, were beyond all praise. He was the only officer who shrank from no responsibility and no task, however arduous.” These, in fact, were no empty praises: seldom could Lord Roberts have been less desirous of paying idle compliments.<sup>2</sup>

Rawlinson’s observation was correct. For all his apparent reserve and hardness there was a strange streak of sentiment in Kitchener that broke out at times in passionate emotion. At the funeral service over the British officers who fell on the Atbara, the normally stern face of the Sirdar was seen streaming with tears.

<sup>1</sup> Maurice, *General Lord Rawlinson*, pp. 31, 159–60.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Esher, *Journals*, II, p. 273.

Later at the Gordon Memorial Service at Khartum he was gentle as a woman and wept unashamedly. Six weeks later at Lady Cromer's funeral service in Cairo Kitchener sobbed aloud. "I liked him more for this," Cromer wrote, "than for anything he said or did during the lengthy relations that I had with him." Behind that terrific façade there lay the heart of the child.

Even eminent strangers, men of the world, men of ability, might feel kept at arm's length by his coolness and reserve. When Kitchener returned from the Sudan Lord Esher made his acquaintance and wrote: "Kitchener is not attractive. None of the men who served with him were attracted to him. I should doubt anyone loving him. It is the coarseness of his fibre, which appears in his face to a marked degree. The eyes are good—but the mouth and jaw and skin are all those of a rough private. Some of Napoleon's marshals, sprung from the ranks, were such men as he." He met Lord Cromer, who seemed to agree: "Lord Cromer . . . shares the personal coolness towards Kitchener which appears to be felt by everyone who comes into contact with him." Still, Lord Esher changed his opinion very considerably in later years.<sup>1</sup>

It is probable indeed that when the Great War came Kitchener had mellowed considerably. Whether it be advancing age, the softening influence of the East or the reaction from the exacting tasks accomplished during some twenty strenuous years, matters little: with the passage of the years Kitchener had lost some of the fibre that had been so remarkable a component of his character in the past. With this declension failings became intensified. The inability to discuss his opinions and acts in public horrified his political colleagues. But,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Esher, *Journals*, I, p. 238, and also p. 3.

never true certain accusations may have been at  
times, such allegations are, at the lowest computation,  
easily overdrawn. To speak of this condition as a  
"tragedy", as Lord Esher does, seems exaggerated.  
That Kitchener acted under impulse, that he was  
headlong and headstrong in his acts and decisions was  
a common belief which gained ground after his en-  
counter with Curzon in India. Yet everything points to  
his impression being erroneous. For he was cautious  
by nature; slow and methodical by habit too. His  
campaigning had never been marked by lightning  
strokes of the Napoleonic type: but was rather the  
result of long, careful preparation based on an abnor-  
mally clear vision of the object in view and of full control  
of the means available for its attainment. To work  
alone and in his own time, that was indeed his great  
strength. In council he never shone. The trick of  
arguing with himself aloud, when engaged in dis-  
cussion, in place of giving a clear-cut opinion, was  
never understood by politicians accustomed to the cut  
and thrust of parliamentary debate. If threatened  
with resistance and, still more, if it ever seemed to him  
that he must be outnumbered or outvoted when he  
felt himself to be right, he would resort to silence or at  
best to a simulated inability of comprehension. Hence  
the charge of stupidity. Even to soldiers of note whom  
he did not know he might appear wanting in intelligence.  
So it was when the new Adjutant-General, General  
Macready, came to make his acquaintance in 1916.  
Says Macready: "Lord Kitchener rambled rather than  
talked, mainly about his own position and powers. . . .  
He touched on the difficulties he encountered with his  
colleagues in the Cabinet, difficulties I well under-  
stood before many weeks had passed, and wound up by

a platitude that every possible man must be got into the army. I listened not without astonishment, for the bearing and attitude of the man who had helped to create order out of chaos in Egypt struck me as sad, almost pathetic.”<sup>1</sup>

Eventually Macready found that “nothing could be more kind or considerate than his attitude, but at Cabinet meetings and conferences, when supporting the claims of the army against sharp-witted politicians, he was out of his depth; . . . it was evident he felt himself at a disadvantage when it came to wrangling across a council table.”<sup>2</sup>

For success he required time, since he was never a quick thinker and, like the Cat once more, he must go his own way. He had never had time to study, or to learn to match his own wits against the man of mere book learning, and he realized that fact full well. When he left South Africa for India he proposed to devote himself to books and to ponder over the past. But India filled his days in other fashion. So he came to the Great War knowing nothing of statecraft, history, or economics, except what experience had taught him. And that against the wits of Whitehall availed him nothing. As Clausewitz wisely stated one century earlier after listening to the interminable controversies round the Allied council tables of 1812-4: “In real action most men are guided merely by the tact of judgment which hits the object more or less accurately, according as they possess more or less genius. This is the way in which all great Generals have acted, and therein partly lay their greatness and their genius, that they always hit upon what was right by this tact. Thus also it will

<sup>1</sup> Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> Macready, loc. cit.

ys be in action, and so far this tact is amply sufficient. When it is a question, not of acting oneself, but of incing others in a consultation, then all depends on r conceptions and demonstration. . . ." The dumb on these occasions will go to the wall amid the tumely of his more glib colleagues, or, quoting usewitz once more, "everyone retaining his own nion, or in a compromise from mutual considerations respect, a middle course really without any value".<sup>1</sup> was much with Kitchener as with his contemporary miral Lord Fisher: the latter could exclaim in such ments, "I know I am right, but I do not know why!" t the admiral had a fiery tongue and a picturesque wer of expression which the field-marshall never ssessed. Even Sir William Robertson, with all his udition and a faculty for clear exposition, would fail mpletely when it came to the council chamber. There is: how great the contrast between these three men f action, each so different in his own sphere and still further different from another type, Sir Henry Wilson, if the nimble, facile mind, that could succeed where the other three all came to grief! To bridge the gulf between these extremes, to combine these various gifts and moral values in one human being seems to be beyond the dispensations of Providence.

No truer thing was said of Kitchener than by Mr. Lloyd George when he compared him to the revolving beams of the lighthouse. The flashes of his genius seemed to come at intervals and pierce the darkness farther and more effectually than any human agency. But the flashes came at greater intervals as time pro gressed and the problems grew more complex and less capable of solution by direct personal intervention.

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Graham, *On War*, Pref., p. xxvi.

Such was the man symbolized by “K. of K.”. To repeat yet again the words that stand at the head of this study, “there he was, towering above the others in character as in inches, by far the most popular man in the country to the end, and a firm rock which stood out amidst the raging tempest”.

## APPENDIX I

### THE KITCHENER-CURZON CONTROVERSY

LORD RONALDSHAY in his biography of Lord Curzon (Chap. XXX) makes some capital out of the fact that the system of military command inaugurated by Lord Kitchener broke down in 1915, just as Lord Curzon had predicted. Sir Beauchamp Duff, then Commander-in-Chief, found the double task to be beyond his powers; so he elected to remain with the Viceroy and gave up the actual command of the troops.

To a certain extent the Viceroy's view was supported by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, who found occasion to regret that the suppression of the Military Member should entail the C.-in-C.'s abstention from many of the inspections and tours that had formed an integral part of the C.-in-C.'s duties. By increasing the claims of the Viceroy on the C.-in-C.'s time, the latter was losing that touch with the troops that had been so valuable in the past. "The personal inspection of the troops by the C.-in-C. diminished and his magnetic influence grew small by degrees and dangerously less."<sup>1</sup>

But that aspect of the case, valid though it might be, was not really a condemnation of Lord Kitchener's reform. General Smith-Dorrien himself, when subsequently there arose a prospect of his proceeding to India

<sup>1</sup> Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of 48 Years' Service*, p. 329.  
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